STAR WARS!

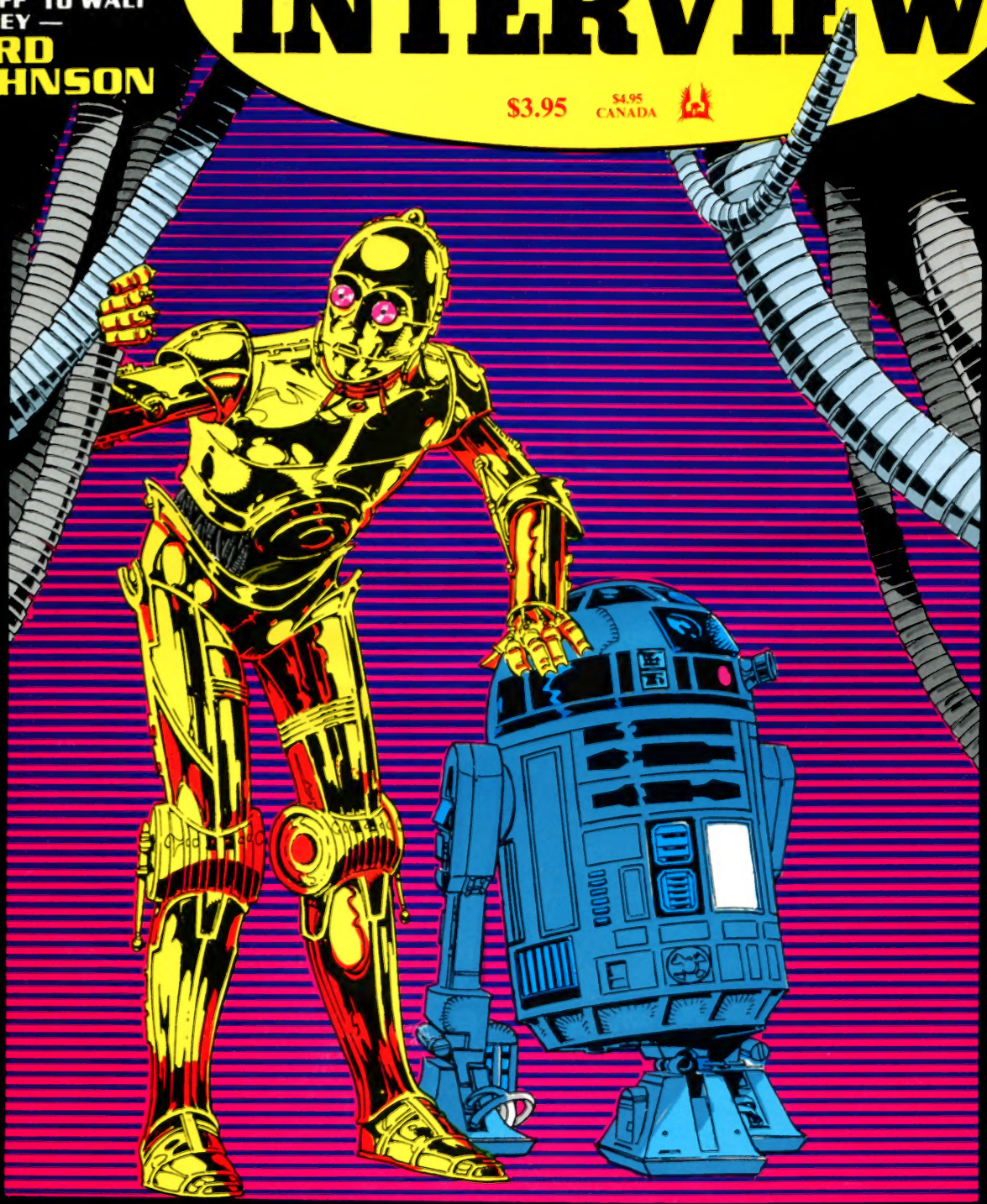
FROM 'DROIDS TO DARK EMPIRE II —
DAN THORSLAND
SPOTLIGHT ON
STAR WARS!
FROM REBEL ASSAULT TO X-WING AND BEYOND —
VINCE LEE
FROM MILTON CANIFF TO WALT DISNEY —
FERD JOHNSON

#130

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

$3.95 $4.95 CANADA



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SPACE
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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS INTERVIEW

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cover art:
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UP FRONT

The King is dead.

It was somewhat of an open secret that **Jack Kirby** suffered poor health in recent times, so while his recent death wasn't exactly a surprise, it was certainly a sad and inevitable sign of the passing of an era.

Kirby was, for me as for so many, the revitalizing force that drew me back to comics, energizing the artform and, along with it, the ambitions of new generations of creators who in turn have cranked up comics to a fever pitch.

Kirby gave us all a new lease on life. And now he's gone.

But his work — ah, his work! — lives on. His art is *alive*. It vibrates with life, bursts from the page, looms even *larger* than life.

There will be no tribute issue of this magazine dedicated to **Jack Kirby.** The very existence of COMICS INTERVIEW is, itself, a tribute to him. And I have always felt it better to honor the living while they are around to appreciate the acknowledgment. I am happy, therefore, that we were able to give the man his due in our recent issue #121, devoted to an appreciation of his art and influence by a number of esteemed fellow artists in the comics field.

Kirby will live forever — gloriously — in his work.

Long live the King!

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FEBRUARY'S CATALOG IS 116 PAGES OF STRICTLY STAR WARS MERCHANDISE. HERE'S WHAT YOU WILL FIND INSIDE:

10 PAGES OF UPCOMING PRODUCT NEWS. (INFORMATION OF PRODUCT THAT IS YET TO COME)

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AN INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR KEVIN J. ANDERSON.
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"A lot of people saw ev[illegible]piraling into the vortex."

From Dark Horse Comics, STAR WARS: DARK LORDS OF THE SITH, Art by Chris Gossett & Mike Barreiro.

As the 1970s retro revival takes hold across the nation, people begin looking back to those turbulent times. The fashions, styles, and politics return to popular culture's consciousness. However, one aspect of the '70s which has not gone out of style on many fans' minds is STAR WARS. The archetypal space fantasy that influenced a generation has never really been gone, despite the last film in the series having been released over a decade ago. Dan Thorsland of Dark Horse Comics hasn't forgotten STAR WARS either. As the editor of the STAR WARS line of comics at Dark Horse, Dan is bringing the popular universe back to comics readers' attention with Dark Horse's variety of striking projects based on the film series. Breaking into comics working on the editorial team of DC's Superman titles, Thorsland is intimately familiar with working with characters that are almost mythological in nature. As Lucasfilm gears up to resume the film series, Thorsland and his team of creators at Dark Horse are working to flesh out the STAR WARS universe and craft a rich history with the kind of fantastic adventures and spectacular graphics that readers expect. It almost seems like STAR WARS was never really gone . . .

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Dan Thorsland.
Age: 29.
Place of Birth: Tuxedo, New York.
Currently Reside: Portland, Oregon.
Education: Three years of college at the School of Visual Arts.
Greatest Influences: High velocities, Ben & Jerry's Chunky Monkey ice cream, **Jack "King" Kirby,** and **Robert E. Howard.**
Books Currently Reading: FAST SOFA.
Dream/Aspiration: Keep doing what I'm doing 'til I drop dead.

MARK LUCAS: *How do you account for the revived interest in STAR WARS?*

DAN THORSLAND: My hopeful and idealistic side thinks that, because of this country's political climate being so close to the way it was when the first film came out, people are looking for that hope again that the film really gave everyone.

When you think about 1977: **Jimmy Carter** is in office, the economy's in the tubes — you've a Southern Democrat in office and **Clinton's** almost got the same approach as **Carter** did. People were just kind of drifting. There was a big dead space in terms of culture. For me, as a 12-year-old kid at the time, I had no idea what the future would hold. The thought of a force or fighting the Republicans, the bad guys, is kind of what the Empire is: Nazis-cum-yuppies (they fall into a lot of classes like that). It was a very enthusiastic hopeful film in a really bleak time for this country. A lot of people saw everything spiraling down into the vortex.

I think the same thing is happening now. People are really worried about whether or not they'll have jobs or whether or not their kids will have jobs, all of these crises in terms of the country splitting into these tiny cultural fragments, and so

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"Five years ago there was still a bad taste in fans'

many people hating so many other people who just happen to live on the other side of the street. Again, it's that symbol of hope, that beacon of hope. If you just get in touch with something, it might all work out. Some spirituality.

It's just damn fun!

On the other side, the pragmatic side, I think there is a certain amount of '70s retro going on now that's very fashionable. It brings to mind the fact that nothing new has been done with STAR WARS for a long time. People are getting hungry. They miss it — I know I did. When DARK EMPIRE came out, I was working at DC and I just went nuts. I was so happy to see it. I love STAR WARS and there was nothing new: no books, no nothing.

MARK: *How did Dark Horse become involved with the STAR WARS books?*

DAN: We basically convinced everybody involved with DARK EMPIRE that we would publish it. At the time, it just didn't seem like Marvel was moving as fast as Lucasfilm and **Tom Veitch** and **Cam Kennedy** wanted them to, in terms of

STAR WARS: DROIDS (from DARK HORSE COMICS #17) by writer Dan Thorsland, penciller Bill Hughes, inker Andy Mushynsky and letterer Bill Pearson.

XOB... XOB! GET UP--ME'S GUTTEN AWAY!
BRRNNK...
THE DEADLIEST DROID IN THE GALAXY... LOOSE IN MY STATION! WRETCHED MACHINES!
OH, MY! WHAT MAD-PENSO? ARTOO?
YOU KNOW THAT R2 UNIT?
WHY, YES SIR! HE AND I HAVE WORKED TOGETHER FOR QUITE SOME TIME. PERHAPS I CAN BE OF SOME ASSISTANCE IN LOCATING HIM?
YOU CAN BE ALL ASSISTANCE! WITH OR WITHOUT YOU, WE'LL TRACK DOWN 10-88, AND IF YOUR LITTLE FRIEND IS HELPING THAT STEEL-PLATED KILLER...
...I'LL MELT THEM BOTH DOWN TO SLAG!

mouths over the last year of Marvel's STAR WARS."

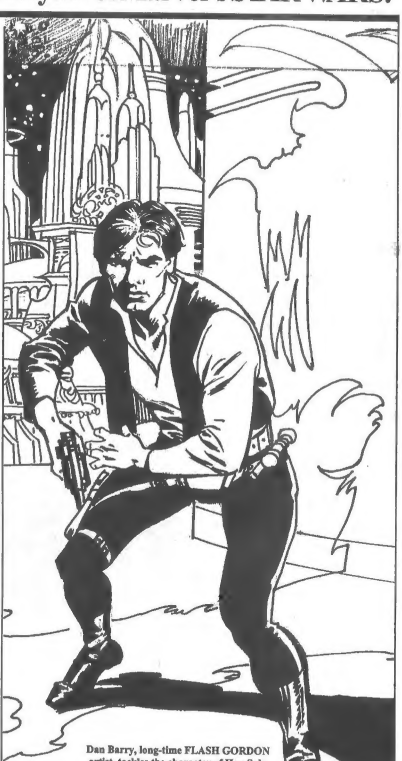
getting the book published. And, no one seemed to have as much an interest as Dark Horse had. At that point, and still now, a vital part of our company is doing successful movie tie-ins. Basically, **Mike Richardson** convinced Lucasfilm and Tom and Cam that it would be much better here. Lo and behold, it was a gigantic success. Mike was right. Again. So, it ended up here. Lucasfilm is really happy with the way things have gone and the way TALES OF THE JEDI has gone. We're going to be developing it into a pretty big license for us over the next couple of years.

MARK: *Why now STAR WARS? Why not five years ago?*

DAN: Maybe five years ago Dark Horse didn't quite have the pull. I think it may not have been as successful as a comic five years ago because there was still a slight bad taste in fans' mouths over the last year or so of the Marvel STAR WARS books. People didn't seem to like them all that much. They seemed to become less and less popular. I suppose there wasn't that ravenous need for new STAR WARS material that there seems to be now. Why Dark Horse has the property now and why we're doing it now is because we just weren't big enough as a company to do ALIENS and PREDATOR and STAR WARS. Five years ago, Dark Horse was a real fledgling company. We had just made it onto the scene with ALIENS. It was about all we could handle. It also takes money and staff and a lot of overhead to produce these books.

MARK: *How do Dark Horse's STAR WARS books differ from Marvel's?*

DAN: It's the same way that most of our books differ from Marvel's and almost any of the larger companies — our development time is much longer. I know that first-hand. I've been here going on almost two years. If I had put out these few books at DC, I would've been fired. They're large companies who've been around for awhile publishing on a monthly basis. That's what their market is and that's what people expect from them. They do it in a different format. I wouldn't go so far as to snub them or say that the books aren't as good, but Dark Horse is known for doing stuff on heavier paper stock for a higher price with more sophisticated color separations and a lot more research and care and feeding. That's part of the reason why larger comics companies don't do as many licensed books. In comparison, it takes a lot of time to put together a STAR WARS book. You have to run it past a lot of people at Lucasfilm. They look over



Dan Barry, long-time FLASH GORDON artist, tackles the character of Han Solo on a Topps trading card. Barry's 1950s art can be seen in current issues of COMICS REVUE.

"Fox didn't grant much leeway in early days, but

everything. You have to coordinate it and make sure a STAR WARS novel does not contradict a STAR WARS comic which does not contradict a STAR WARS radio play or video game. You have to look at the massive wads of reference and glean the real continuity from it. To do that takes a lot of lead time. I think that's why the Dark Horse books have been a hit. We've paid attention to that lead time, tried to get them right, and tried to stay close to the feel of what a STAR WARS should be.

MARK: *How much respect does a writer need to hold towards the characters? Does Lucasfilm or Fox grant you a lot of leeway?*

DAN: I understand Fox did not grant us all that much leeway in the early days, but over time they've come to not only respect us but borrow from us a bit in terms of what we've done with the ALIENS license. I think the same thing is happening with STAR WARS. You have to convince somebody. This is an extremely important property for Lucasfilm. It is something that is vitally important to **George Lucas** himself. If we're going to go out and have C3PO in a dress and running around with an Uzi, it might upset them a little. We have to convince the licensor that we know what we're doing, that we're trying to remain faithful to their vision. Oftentimes, licensors don't necessarily have their vision on paper. It isn't so simple as having a story bible for us to look at. Film is not done like television in that there's a story bible for the characters. You have to interpret it from the source material. If you interpret it right, they're happy and they give you a little more leeway. For the most part, we get a lot of leeway in some areas and very little in others.

MARK: *It sounds a lot like STAR TREK and Paramount.*

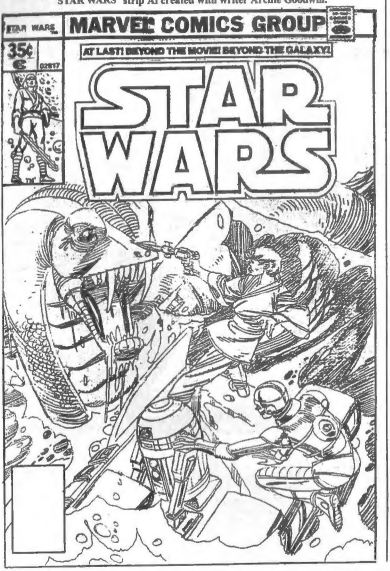
DAN: Paramount is a little different. STAR TREK was a TV show. **Gene Roddenberry** had bible after bible, a lot of stuff, because a rotating group of writers worked on each of those episodes. There's more of the "official" source material. Paramount, realizing that this was a vital property for them, tried to stick as close to that as possible. **Roddenberry** himself, up until the day he died, and his personal assistant were approving every single script that DC published in terms of DC Comics. Unfortunately, **George Lucas** doesn't have the time to read every single script we send down there. But, his assistants and the people who work within Lucasfilm approve it for him. In the end, he probably reads everything we publish, because every once in awhile we'll get a card or a note. **Tom Veitch** was down at Lucasfilm at one point and just happened to run into George and asked if he liked the comics. George said they were great. That's as much feedback as he can get because **Lucas** is very, very busy.

MARK: *Is there anything really off-bounds?*

DAN: It's mostly where we can't go, timelines we can't use or characters we can't alter beyond a certain point at certain times. It's obvious that George has something very definite in mind for the next series of films which take place before A NEW HOPE (the first STAR WARS film). We just can't go there. They aren't going to tell us specifically what it is (this is probably going to be one of the best-kept secrets in Hollywood until these films come out, or at least in Marin County). You can kind of see what the next batch of films are going to be from where we can't go, from the negative space. We definitely nibble at the edges.

Every once in awhile you'll get something that doesn't make complete sense at the time but obviously makes sense to them; there's a hidden agenda there. "You can't do this." They'll get really specific about not visiting a certain planet at a certain time or at all. Or, not introducing any more characters from this race. It's

Below: the cover of Marvel's STAR WARS #11, mid-1970s by Gil "Sugar" Kane. Next page: Al Williamson's cover from Dark Horse's "classic" collection of the STAR WARS strip Al created with writer Archie Goodwin.



Cover ©1977 Marvel Entertainment Group.

they've come to not only respect us but borrow from us."

nearly as challenging as Paramount. Paramount likes for Captain Kirk and Jean-Luc Picard and all the characters that are introduced in the TV show to be the stars of their comics. Lucasfilm has been really generous with us in letting us come up with our own characters, which most licensors don't like all that much. They would rather us keep pushing Robocop and Ripley (from ALIENS) for as long as she's alive, basically keep pushing the main characters of the films so that they can parlay that license into a toy line. Lucasfilm doesn't try to do that with us at all. They give us a lot of leeway. Make up TALES OF THE JEDI. Go 4,000 years in the past and make up a whole social system, whole worlds. That's great. As long as it behaves and sits within the same social, economic, and political structure as the rest of the STAR WARS universe, you get a lot of free rein. The person who's directly in charge of the license at Lucasfilm encourages that, if anything, which is terrific.

MARK: *Can you chart the future unhindered?*

DAN: Almost. DARK EMPIRE you can do almost anything you want with. Writer **Tom Veitch** has done such enormous amounts of reference and research that I don't think I've even seen everything he's looked at.He has a pretty free hand with the material and does almost anything he can. It shows. We've introduced a lot of characters. We've re-introduced Boba Fett. We've re-introduced the Emperor several times. We get a lot of freedom with that.

MARK: *Are the readers taking to the new characters?*

DAN: Yeah, they have. That was something that was really pleasant about TALES OF THE JEDI. It's been an enormous success with the fans. I get ten letters a day from that book. Very few of them are negative. I got one or two people who said that without Luke, Han or Leia, this comic is like CONAN without Conan the Barbarian. I disagree wholeheartedly. Most of the fans, however, love it. These are characters that these guys made up. Not only are they exploring when the Jedi Knights were strong and great, but they can kill. They can change them. They can throw them to the Dark Side. They can do anything they want with these characters. The possibilities are endless. They're very excited about that. It's fun. There's still light sabres, there's still the Force, there's still the background elements that make STAR WARS a tremendous amount of fun. We also have that x-factor that we can do anything we want. We can blow up planets. We can do tremendous wars and change characters any way we want. They seem to be excited by that.

MARK: *What do you think it is about STAR WARS that adapts so well to the comics medium?*

DAN: The fun thing about STAR WARS, and in a way it doesn't adapt that well to the comics medium unless you split it up into pieces, is that STAR WARS covers a lot of ground in terms of theme. There's a lot of humor. There's a lot of action and adventure. There's a lot of spirituality and drama. It's not hard-core science fiction but there's a lot of invented science fiction, there's a lot of invented alien races and worlds. Every time there's a scene change, they always try for the most fantastic setting they can find. It's very big and very grand. That translates well into comics because, if anything, Lucas at the time was trying to create something on film that could not be created on film and could not be created in reality, which obviously had been the domain of comics as a visual storytelling medium up to that point. He wanted to make a movie that looked like it had an unlimited budget. He wanted to build entire worlds for scenes to take place on. Through the magic of state-of-the-art special effects, he did it. In comics, we've been able to do that for years. So, that

"Does anyone remember NEW GODS or Kirby's The

element translates really well. The larger-than-life operatic grand feel that particularly the second and third films had in terms of the characters, Luke's struggle against the Dark Side and trying to go to the Light Side, and his whole fight with Darth Vader at the end of THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK is classic comic-book material. A grand villein against a down-trodden hero.

MARK: *So comics influenced STAR WARS which influenced comics again.*

DAN: When you think about it, does anyone remember NEW GODS or **Jack Kirby's** The Source? George was probably a lot like us when we were younger. He was sitting there reading a lot of that early Marvel stuff when he was younger in school, loving the giant mythic nature of it. To George and to STAR WARS, mythology is a very crucial part of it. If anything, that's what modern superhero comics have always striven to be and are the best at: doing grand modern mythology.

MARK: *Is that what STAR WARS is, a new mythology for a new generation?*

DAN: Totally. Absolutely. I think that there are deliberate underpinnings of Zen Buddhism. I think there are deliberate choices made so that you're always reminded that you can go good and you can go bad. To me, one of the most poignant things about the first film that got to me when I was a kid and still always gets me when I watch it as an adult is Luke sitting there, having just been told by his uncle that he can't leave with the rest of his friends and join the Imperial Academy to fly and shoot rebels. he's sitting there looking out at Tatooine's two suns, thinking about what's going to happen in his life. There's those two suns, those two beacons, those two choices that he can make. As we all know, it was made for him. I think that there's definitely a direct and deliberate infusion of a new mythology and a modern day religion. I don't think it goes much further than just being a kind of pop religion. Bottom line, the movies are about entertainment, even more so than STAR TREK. STAR WARS is about movement, excitement, sound, and entertainment. But, that's one of the neat things about it; it does have all of these elements. I think one of the more successful elements is its spirituality.

MARK: *You actually got your start in comics working on another mythological creature, Superman.*

DAN: I miss it. That was the sweetest couple of years of my career, if not my life, working with **Mike Carlin,** working on the Superman books. I am so glad to see all the people that work on the Superman books get the success they worked really hard for and absolutely deserve. They were some of the most under appreciated books in the business, up until last summer. **Carlin's** the best editor in the business. I strive to be as good as he is. If there's an Obi-Wan Kenobi in comics, it's **"Big Mike" Carlin.**

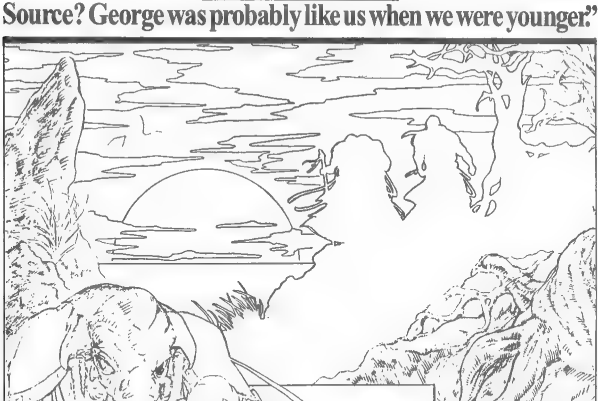
MARK: *Why leave this classic, archetypal character for these others?*

DAN: Like Luke, you have to strike out on your own. I think that's something that goes back to **Lucas'** core and is something I really share with him, which is probably why I responded so well to this stuff, even as a child. You can stay at the safe, almost parental company. There was very little that was negative about my career at DC. I was there for six years. I had a lot of really good friends who I desperately miss. I was very happy there, particularly for those last couple of years before I left. But, sometimes you have to strike out on your own. Dark Horse, if anything, is striking waaaay out. It's an established company, but it's also 3,000 miles away from my place of birth and my family. And, it doesn't do superhero books. I have too much respect for comics as an art form not to see if I could edit and could appreciate as deeply alternative comics as much as other people do. Dark

Our interviewee asks if anyone remembers Jack Kirby or his NEW GODS series — of course we do. Here's the ad artwork from the quality reprint from the mid-1980s, by Kirby and inker Mike Royer.

THE NEW GODS (Orion & Darkseid) ©1984 DC Comics, Inc.

Source? George was probably like us when we were younger."



Chris Gossett's pencil work on the DARK LORDS OF THE SITH series from STAR WARS licensee Dark Horse Comics.

Horse is a good home for that. I get a chance to work on ALIENS and STAR WARS, which I love, and loved when I was at DC as well. But, I also get the chance to work on some more unusual material — which I have since I've been here.

MARK: *How did you become involved with the STAR WARS titles?*

DAN: It was pretty simple, actually. **Barbara Kesel** is one of the people responsible for getting me here. She worked at DC as well. I got in touch with her when I was looking to jump ship. She was editing DARK EMPIRE. She had edited DARK EMPIRE I and was in the process of doing TALES OF THE JEDI and DARK EMPIRE II about six months after I came on board. Just her managerial duties and the growing line of Legends stuff that was starting to become more and more important to the company at that time (including not only **John Byrne's** book but some of the books that have followed since) was just taking up too much of her time. She passed over TALES OF THE JED! to me. I knew Tom from working on DC's CLASH. We hit it off and got along fine. I got along fine with Lucasfilm. Some of my other projects started to fall by the wayside. I started to finish off some of my commitments to UNIVERSAL MONSTERS and some other books here. The more I started editing this stuff, the more it reawakened that flame of how much I loved this stuff as a kid. I started calling my mother up and asking her to send box after box of stuff out of the basement. So, here I am ripping open all these cardboard boxes and unearthing all these great memories from when I was in junior high, pulling out all my ART OF STAR WARS books and all my old kits. I actually mail-ordered the original line of Mattel action figures, including Luke with the telescope and light sabre. I was going, "God, this stuff is great. This is so much fun." Somebody had to do it. I was more than willing to do it. I said, "Why don't you keep giving STAR WARS to me?" As my editorial desk opened up terms of room, I started adding more and more projects related to STAR WARS. Now it looks like that'll be my future here, doing almost exclusively STAR WARS.

MARK: *And you've actually branched out into writing as well.*

DAN: Yeah. I have to say, "Pinch me. I'm dreaming." It was complete luck. I have **Ryder Windham** to thank for it. When I got TALES OF THE JEDI, there was also talk of doing a DROIDS book. We were going to do it aimed almost exclusively at children. It landed on another editor's desk. He started farming around for a

"When this is over, I'm going to sleep for six months."

writer. He started talking to me; he wasn't quite the fan of the material as I was, and his background isn't quite mainstream comics as much as mine is. He mostly asked me for ideas and bounced things off me. I kept feeding him story ideas. It got harder and harder for him to find a writer to do not only what Dark Horse wanted the book to be but Lucasfilm as well. They both had a very specific idea of how the book was going to be produced and marketed, how it was going to be aimed at a slightly younger audience but with a certain level of sophistication so as not to disappoint the older STAR WARS fans. He just said, "Hell, why don't you just write it?" It was that easy. Well, I wouldn't say "easy." It took about six months to actually get everything approved. It was even more research than I'd been doing up to that point, particularly in terms of finding a time line to place the series. That was the most difficult thing. Everybody at Lucasfilm said fine. **Mike Richardson** said, "Okay." But, everyone was hesitant about it because I didn't have any big credits to my name up to that point. I'd done a little ghosting here and there in the background, but I had majored in screenwriting in college, so I do know my way around a word processor. I swore scout's honor to do right by R2D2 and C3PO and do exactly as told. I think the results are pretty good. I do think **Bill Hughes** and **Ian Gibson** are probably the best guys to ever grace a DROIDS comic, and that includes the stuff that's been done in the past. **Bill Hughes** is really impressive. I don't think anyone really knows his background as an artist, but he does have a full-size replica of R2D2 in his house. I have seen pictures of it. His intimacy and familiarity with the characters from the whole STAR WARS universe really comes across on the page. I won't say read it for the scripts, but pick it up for the art. Beautiful stuff. Anyone who likes the kind of feel of the BATMAN ADVENTURES comics based on the animated series, the kind of open, almost traditional cartoony comics feel — but with a sophisticated script — will find it with DROIDS.

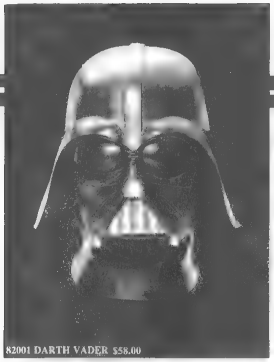
MARK: *Has the writing bug bit you?*

DAN: I can't say I ever want to have to do this again. As my wife can attest, it is work. It is really hard work. My hat is off to people like **Archie Goodwin** and **Denny O'Neil** and a lot of the people who have managed to do the day job of editing books, then go home on the weekends and write — because I just start going nuts. Around the fourth issue. I was beating my head against the wall. Where I found the energy to do this stuff, I don't know. When all of this is over, I'm probably going to sleep for six months. It takes up a lot of time. Every night, I go home and work about three hours, and consistently work all day Saturday or all weekend on the book. It's a lot of work for the freelance writers, too. I'm certainly not going to say it's something anybody can do: "Sure, work at Dairy Queen during the day and write comics at night!" No way. Comics is tough.

MARK: *How do you put together the creative teams for the books?*

DAN: The way I've always done this is to look to see if someone's talents are appropriate for the project. There's no such thing as bad writing or art. There's inappropriate or inexperienced writing, but there's not bad writing. You might not want **Shakespeare** to be writing every issue of THE PUNISHER. That's not to say that he's a bad writer, but his talents may not be lent to doing that kind of material. When it comes to inexperience, sooner or later somebody has to get their first shot. That was the case with **Chris Gossett.** He didn't have that much experience, and he still had a little bit of growing to do. But, when people see DARK LORDS OF THE SITH, they'll know exactly what kind of potential Tom and everyone at Dark Horse saw in Chris, because it was a real push for Chris. My hat's off to him because Tom realized he was a brilliant artist at a very formative stage. Chris' stuff has grown by leaps and bounds on every page. The reason I like Chris so much on the book is because not only is he a skilled artisan, but he has an enormous amount of enthusiasm for the work. That is a big factor as well. If I have a pool of people to draw from and they're

Two examples of the "Galaxy" trading cards from Topps: Dave Dorman's cover painting, and Cam Kennedy's original piece.



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"Lucasfilm wants samples of work before approving a project."

all equally talented, and one may be a big name and not really care for the material that much, and the other may not be as big a name but just loves the stuff, I will go for the guy or girl who loves the stuff. I know they're going to give 110% and be there every month. The fans should not expect or accept anything less. They're paying their money.

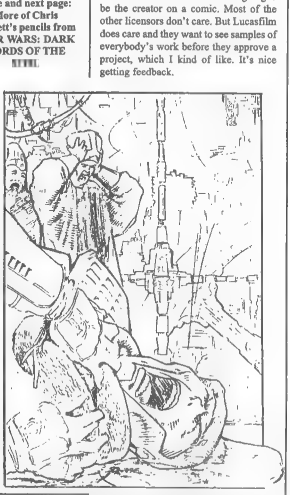
MARK: *It seems like you're discovering or giving the opportunity to a lot of new artists — Janine Johnston for example.*

DAN: She had a hard time with that first DARK HORSE COMICS chapter of TALES OF THE JEDI. I don't think people realize how good she really is. I think she's going to surprise a lot of people with ELFQUEST because that's more along her style. She does the mythic aspects and the human aspects of STAR WARS really well, but she struggled a little bit with the technology and the design, mostly the hardware and stuff like that. She's really, really good. I'm very happy to hear that she's going on to ELFQUEST. It would be nice if we could snag her and get her to come back to do another STAR WARS story sometime in the future. She sounds like she's happy doing fully-painted work. I think that's her strength. At the time she did the DHC job, I think it was the first time she'd done any black-and-white comics work. That's not to say it was bad. Not at all. It was much more work for her than it should have been.

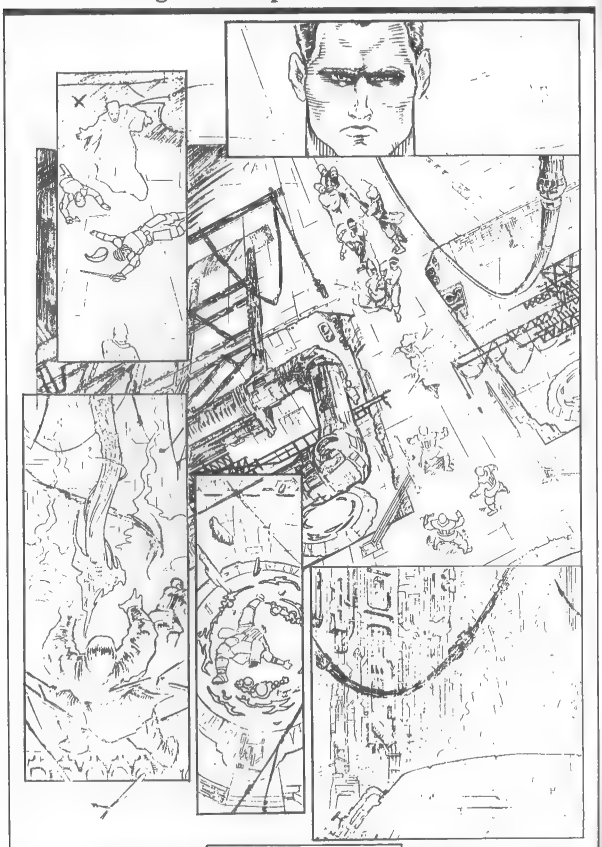
MARK: *How did she and Tom first get the assignment for TALES?*

DAN: Tom got it coming off of DARK EMPIRE. Everybody at Lucasfilm and Dark Horse realized that Tom knew STAR WARS and that the fans loved what Tom did with STAR WARS. When I read DARK EMPIRE, I knew that Tom was talented, but no one really know how talented he was or how well he could do something that fit his talents. Right there you see the appropriateness of it. He just didn't make as much of a name for himself on some of the other projects he'd done. People just wouldn't give him a chance. Because STAR WARS is so popular, they would give him a chance. They'd look at his writing and realize, man, this guy can spin a yarn. He has a real feel for that big, epic, sweeping, powerful, emotional storytelling down, and it really lends itself well to STAR WARS. When he came up with the idea of TALES OF THE JEDI, which was just genius to go 4,000 years in the past (what about when the Jedi were strong? what about when the Republic was in its early days?), this was a great way to tell these samurai-like stories of all these Jedis wandering through the galaxy trying to keep the peace on all these planets. We sat down with a pile of samples, and one of us (maybe **Barbara Kesel**) picked out Janine. I was really amazed to see a licensor so interested in who was going to be the creator on a comic. Most of the other licensors don't care. But Lucasfilm does care and they want to see samples of everybody's work before they approve a project, which I kind of like. It's nice getting feedback.

Here and next page: More of Chris Gossett's pencils from STAR WARS: DARK LORDS OF THE SITH.



"We're working on an adaptation of SPLINTER IN THE



MIND'S EYE. It's been out of print for a long time."

NE OF THESE FLOURISHING HYPERSPACE TERMINALS IS LOCATED NEAR THE STENNESS SYSTEM ON THE RIM OF THE GALAXY.
THE STENNESS SYSTEM IS ON THE MINING FRONTIER.
THE SCUM OF THE GALAXY PASS THROUGH THIS STATION...ON THEIR WAY TO STEALING MINING RIGHTS FROM THE NEWBIES.
WHAT A CHEERFUL PLACE!

STAR WARS: TALES OF THE JEDI #3 (of 5), by writer Tom Veitch and artist Janine Johnston. Dan edits.

MARK: *Will there be more JEDI comics?*

DAN: Oh yes. DARK LORDS OF THE SITH is a very direct sequel to TALES OF THE JEDI. All of the characters hat are introduced in TALES are major players in DARK LORDS OF THE SITH. And Sunrider in particular is a pivotal character in DARK LORD. A lot of the background characters play very significant roles. We're also going to be doing a 1-2-issue bridge between TALES and DARK LORDS which will probably be out sometime over the summer. We haven't scheduled it yet, but it's going to be great. Tom is writing that as well. That will bring all the characters from TALES and set up the big war to come in DARK LORDS.

MARK: *And there's going to be another DARK EMPIRE?*

DAN: Yep. We're working on it now. It should be out by December 1994. You're going to see the Emperor once again trying to track down our noble heroes and wipe them out. It's basically just a direct continuation of the events in DARK EMPIRE I. The empire is still in a state of flux, but the Emperor is trying to reassert his power. Most of it centers around the Rebellion and the Empire trying to take over a planet that is being run by a weapons designer. Both the Empire and the Rebels want this weapons designer because he's the one who's responsible for designing the most lethal battleships and weaponry in the galaxy.

MARK: *Boba Fett, of all people, is getting his own storyline?*

DAN: We're working on it. Boba is somebody a lot of people are requesting a series on. It's in development.

MARK: *Are we going to see the principals — Luke, Han Solo, Leia — a little more?*

DAN: Not really. Much of what has been told about Luke, Han and Leia is all that we can tell. What we will try to do so that people won't be missing their favorites on the comics page is adapting some pre-existing work that has actually been out of print for a long, long time or has just recently been printed but translated over to comics form. We're in the process of doing an adaptation of **Timothy Zahn's** HEIR OF THE EMPIRE novel by a top European creator. We're also working on doing an adaptation of SPLINTER IN THE MIND'S EYE. It's been out of print for a long time. Apparently, it's going to be reissued in March, 1994. Look for a four-issue adaptation of that book sometime around Christmas, 1994.

"Lucas has a specific idea of what the next batch of

MARK: *Louise Simonson and June Brigman will be doing some work for you?*

DAN: Yes. This is an original-material work that introduces some new characters but has some fairly crucial bits of Leia's early adventures as well, though she's mostly a guest-star in the book. That's the difficulty we find ourselves up against with Lucasfilm. It's easy to come up with storyline after storyline, but if you want to place it in a specific place and time and have one of the characters from the films show up, you have to make sure that time is available. We will not, as many other licensors have done, have somebody who's lived 60 years live 500 years worth of adventures. Lucasfilm doesn't want to see that happen. It's going to be plausible. If Leia is 18 at the time of STAR WARS and it's 20 years in the past, Leia's not alive. She has not been born yet. You won't see her. If she is somewhere at this time and date and we have a series going on concurrently that has some characters from outside of the films, you won't see Leia. She's there. She cannot leave there and magically appear in the spot where our characters are. That's part of the difficulty with DROIDS, trying to find a place where R2D2 and C3PO could be. Fortunately, being so much older than everybody else in the STAR WARS universe (because droids don't really have a set lifetime), we did find some time pre-A NEW HOPE for them to have a few adventures.

MARK: *So, there's no Elseworlds or Legends of STAR WARS?*

DAN: No, there will be no Legends. There will be no Elseworlds. You're never going to see that happen with STAR WARS. Every once in awhile we may step on each other's toes, and there might be a little bit of rule bending, but it's unintentional. If anything, we will try to shed some light on things that might have been a little confusing in the past.

MARK: *What other books do you have coming up?*

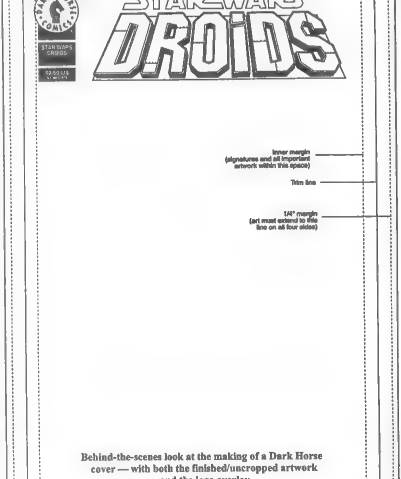
DAN: In terms of STAR WARS, this may sound really bizarre but it actually makes perfect sense. We are working on putting together an X-Wing series based on the computer game which has been the number one computer game for almost a year and a half now for the IBM platform. We have a very interesting idea. I'm talking with someone who's closely affiliated with the game. We're going to be turning it into a pretty compelling storyline. Again, it's an example of a character you may not have seen before in the films but he was there in the background. In this case he was at the battle of the Death Star in the first film. This details how he got there. We'll also be doing some adaptations of upcoming books from Bantam, including TALES FROM THE CANTEEN, and we have some plans on doing an ALIENS & MONSTERS, which is something LucasArts is turning into a really interesting corner of the STAR WARS universe. At this point, DARK LORDS will take us straight through to almost 1996. That's almost 12 issues of material. Speaking of cross continuity, I should note that **Kevin Anderson,** whose JEDI ACADEMY book is just an enormous seller is one of the people contributing to DARK LORDS OF THE SITH. He's co-writing it with Tom.

MARK: *Do you have the option to adapt the upcoming movie?*

DAN: Probably. We don't know exactly. No one will tell us the specific date when the next films will come out. But if I'm alive and kicking, and Dark Horse is still publishing STAR WARS comics, we're going to do it. I have more than a few ideas of who should do the adaptation, in terms of illustrations at least.

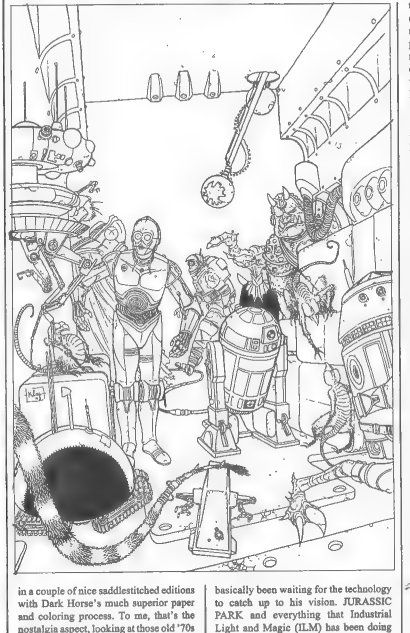
MARK: *Archie Goodwin and Howard Chaykin?*

DAN: We're actually reprinting that stuff, the older Marvel books. We got the film from Marvel. They were very nice and gracious in sending it to us. It'll be recolored and reformatted and reprinted



Behind-the-scenes look at the making of a Dark Horse cover — with both the finished/uncropped artwork and the logo overlay.

films will be. He's waiting for technology to catch up."



in a couple of nice saddlestitched editions with Dark Horse's much superior paper and coloring process. To me, that's the nostalgia aspect, looking at those old '70s comics with all those boogielines from the bad plastic plates.

MARK: *So, should we expect a re-issue of those old WELCOME BACK, KOTTER comics?*

DAN: Only if we can get **Gabe Kaplan** to write 'em.

MARK: *What can you tell us about the upcoming STAR WARS movie? Why has George Lucas waited so long?*

DAN: **George Lucas** has a very specific idea of what the next batch of films will be. I have a feeling he's had that in mind for a long time. As far as I can tell, he's basically been waiting for the technology to catch up to his vision. JURASSIC PARK and everything that Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) has been doing with computer graphics is basically research grants for the next batch of STAR WARS movies. He has something in mind that's going to be grand, huge, and really fun and exciting. I can't quite put my finger on it just yet, but I have some ideas.

MARK: *Clone Wars?*

DAN: I dunno. Maybe. Lucas said many years ago that these movies are too expensive and too difficult to make. When the technology is available, if they can do this without all the stress and strain and aggravation, then he'll make the next batch of movies. It looks like computers have caught up to him. As much as the first STAR WARS film pushed the visual boundaries of the medium, the next STAR WARS films will certainly do the same thing if not ten times that.

MARK: *Is STAR WARS still relevant in today's society? Can it really adapt to the '90s or a new millennium?*

DAN: Sure. Like any good mythology, it plays off of ancient things. If you look at the way the first film played, there are bits of BEOWULF in there. The young warrior leaving the safety of his tribe to go out and battle an ancient evil. That's classic mythology. There's no reason why that shouldn't play in the '90s state of mind. Part of the reason we've done DROIDS the way we've done it is that there're a lot of parents out there for whom STAR WARS was a significant experience in their young lives. Now that they're older, now that they have kids of their own, I have a feeling they're turning their kids on to STAR WARS. They want them to feel the same way, not necessarily about the property, but just gleaning a certain amount of value or ethics from the film. There's a lot of Zen in there. If you look at the way the Jedis meditate and behave, you'll see a lot of Zen. Clearing your mind and letting yourself become one with everything, not using hate and anger to achieve any specific ends. It's pretty interesting. There's a lot of morality in there that I think will definitely translate over to the '90s. If anything, people running around with guns, the riots, the economic problems in this country beg for a film that preaches not only tolerance and understanding but an appreciation for the simpler side of life. As much as STAR WARS is riddled with technology and action and weaponry and the pinnings of a classic Hollywood adventure film, it's got that undercurrent of a simple existence, the samurai monk with a light sabre.

MARK: *It's attractive.*

DAN: I think so. It still gets me after all these years and I'm a jaded guy. I've been at it for awhile. I'm coming up on eight years in this business and I still get a big thrill out of every script I edit and every new page of art I get.

MARK: *What's it like to know that you're probably influencing a generation?*

DAN: It's intimidating in the extreme. I don't think that anybody who works on these books doesn't feel that. Even people who pretend to be kind of callous, you don't see the kind of almost-sarcastic

"I get letters from children who say their parents talked

disgust that you see in many people out there who are just working for money in the comics industry. They just do it for the sake of a quick buck. I don't think anybody who works on a STAR WARS project is doing that. It's because you get these letters and you get people approaching you at conventions, practically pleading with you, "Don't screw this up. Don't ruin this. Don't destroy this." This thing is too important and too important to me personally to just make a pile of crap out of it.

You get the horror stories and the typical visions of the self-obsessed and self-professed fanboys at comics conventions coming up to you and telling you that this is the most significant thing in their lives. But it wasn't the case in San Diego, where a young man came up to me. He probably wasn't much younger than I was. He looked like a plenty well-adjusted human being with a girlfriend and a job and everything else people equate with "normality" (whatever that is). He just pulled me aside and said very quietly and very seriously that these things were important and meant a lot to him. "They mean a lot to me and I hope you take it very seriously when you do it. It would be a real disappointment if it was just the same hackneyed stuff." I never got his name. I wish I had. I would've loved to have gotten a letter from him on TALES OF THE JEDI and figure out whether we did it right. But he was very serious and I felt it, too. I was intimidated. I walked away from that one going, "Oh my god, he's right."

Two covers by two masters: Al Williamson, top, and George Evans, bottom. Both are from Dark Horse's STAR WARS CLASSICS series.

about the movies and now they want to see the movies."

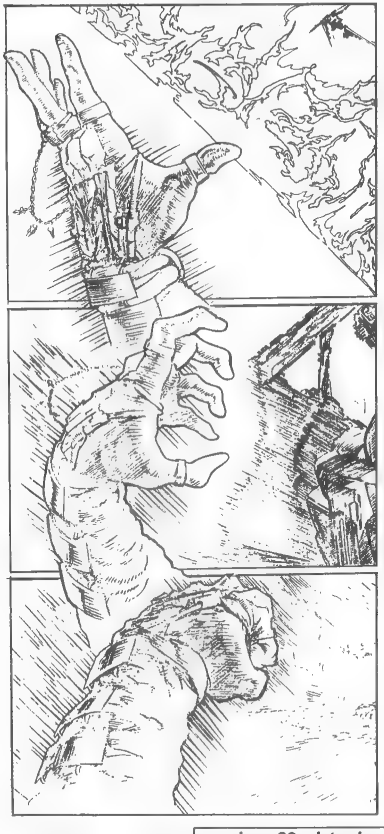
Fully finished panels from DARK LORDS OF THE SITH. Art by Gossett & Barreiro.

As much as people boo and hiss and hate it when a sequel or one in a line of films comes out that they've desperately been waiting to see and it's a clunker, a dog, a turkey, I don't want to be responsible for that. I've done it. I've been to films where I sit down. I can't wait to see it. Then it's, "That stunk." It's so disappointing. I feel it almost more as an editor than I do as a writer. When you're writing a STAR WARS book, I try to get as much reference and emotion going there and make sure that I'm not only being true to what to me feels like a STAR WARS comic in a STAR WARS environment and world, but try to make sure the characters don't stray from their bounds (like C3PO running around in a dress with an Uzi). At the same time, you know there's going to be someone as talented as **Bill Hughes** or **Ian Gibson** saving your ass. These guys are going to take that script and it's going to look great. Particularly with Ian, issue #3 of DROIDS is marvelous. The pencils just came in on that. They're just so much fun. You can see a lot of life being brought to it because it is such a visual experience for the most part. It's not as hard as a writer, but I guess Tom would argue that . . . and he'd probably be right. He works harder than almost any comics writer I've ever seen at making sure this stuff goes out the door very polished and very clean. His scripts take very little work. He knows what he's doing, and he works extremely hard to get it right.

MARK: *Conceivably, for some kids this might be their first exposure to STAR WARS.*

DAN: Oh yes, it is. I get a lot of letters from younger children who either say that their parents talked about the movies and bought the comic and now they want to see the movies, or it's one of their first exposures, kids who might have seen the movies on TV or might have rented them but didn't realize they weren't just movies, that there was an entire social consciousness surrounding these films at the time. They had no idea. Then, they

"I was miserable when I was 12. I hated my life. I hated



walk into a toy store and see the models, which are popular again, or they walk into a comics shop and see the STAR WARS comics sitting up there. They love it. I constantly get phone calls and letters from people who just can't find those first printings of DARK EMPIRE and had no idea it existed. They thought people had just given up on doing any new STAR WARS material. They're so glad to see that it's back. We're going to make sure it remains very noisy from now on in.

MARK: *Back in '77, did you ever think STAR WARS would have this lasting impact?*

DAN: Oh sure. I was 12 years old. It was the most important thing of my life. I thought it was going to rule the world. At the sake of overstating something or sounding really maudlin, I was a giant fan. I was a miserable kid when I was 12 years old. I hated my life.I hated school. I had no friends I could stand. I buried my head in books. I wanted to escape it. When I went and saw STAR WARS for the first time, I had a recurring dream for months afterwards that I would wake up in the morning and the Millennium Falcon would be parked in my backyard. I would climb in that thing, hit the hyperdrive, and blow the dust of that lousy suburb off my heels and never see it again. I would go out in the universe and have a great destiny, become a Jedi, and have abilities I'd never even dreamed of until somebody came along and told me. Yeah, I thought it would have great impact. I never forgot it.

MARK: *Are you still a fan?*

DAN: Oh yeah. Just today, I got **P. Craig Russell** to agree to do a few pages of **X**, the superhero comic I edit for Dark Horse. I just couldn't sit down for half an hour. I'm a big fan.

MARK: *Do you see the future as bright and hopeful as George Lucas?*

DAN: As depressed a kid as I was, and I stayed a pretty cranky individual well into my 20s, I guess I do. The lesson you learn from STAR WARS isn't that you're going to beat the Empire, but it's a great cause and noble struggle. I think the same is true of life. If people are trying to oppress you or if they're trying to screw with your livelihood and your family, it isn't whether or not you die, it's how you die. It's whether or not you've lived your life the way you wanted to live it up to that point. If I'm hit by a bus going home tonight, not a regret. I did what I wanted to do. I think that there are a lot of people out there who somehow feel trapped or doomed. I remind them time and time again that life does indeed have limitless possibilities. If you really want some-

school. I had no friends. I buried my head in books."

thing bad enough, you can do it or at least have a great time striving for it. I think that's one of the things that Lucas is very right about. It's also part of that whole mythological/quasi-religious underpinning of STAR WARS. To quote Yoda, "Wars do not make a warrior great." there's a lot of truth to that statement. There's a lot of wise advice in that script. It isn't so much the fighting and the struggle and the chaos, it's whether you really have your center. It's whether or not you feel you're being true to yourself and good to the people around you, really living up to whatever potential you have. If you're the best Burger King flipper in the world, great. I've seen taxicab drivers who were the happiest men in the world. I respect them. That's all they want to be, and they're good at it. There's an art to everything. "Am I a good person?" I don't know, do you feel like one? So, yeah, I see the future as being as bright or bleak as you want it to be.

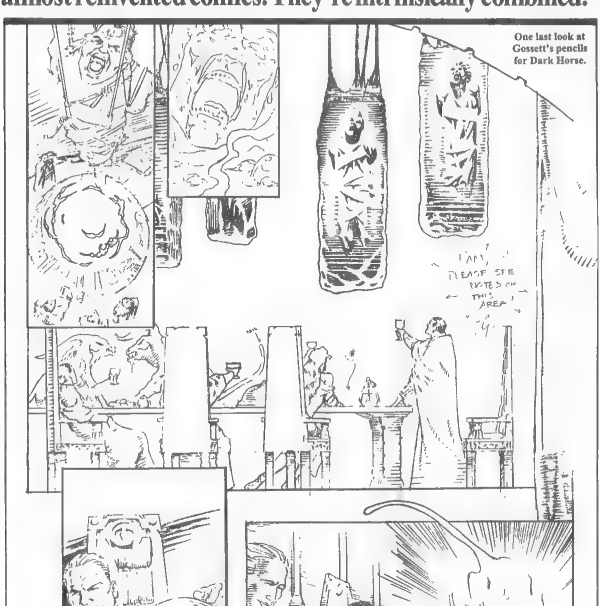
MARK: *If STAR WARS were never filmed, would comics have to create it?*

DAN: It's such a tough question to answer. I think that STAR WARS wasn't so much created as drawn out of a specific consciousness at a specific time. It would have invented itself if **Lucas** hadn't sat down and done it. You needed the talent. One of the sad things with him being so busy now is that **Lucas** is one of the best film directors that America has. He's got a really natural style and a real understanding of how to put a movie together. Look at THX-1138. That's a brilliant, dark, and disturbing view of the future. It isn't all bright in his eyes. Also AMERICAN GRAFFITI, the way he shot all those actors as kids just shambling in front of a camera almost improvising. STAR WARS was almost a natural thing. It draws so much of itself from things that have come before, from **Kurosawa**, from FLASH GORDON, from comics, from almost every adventure medium there is. There's a young guy with a dream. It's a male thing, but it's starting to translate more and more to women as it gets older

"I think comics invented STAR WARS and STAR WARS

Exclusive artwork by Dave Gibbons (GIVE ME LIBERTY, WATCHMEN, et al.) for another of the Topps cards.

almost reinvented comics. They're intrinsically combined."



One last look at Gossett's pencils for Dark Horse.

and more sophisticated a concept. If there's a human being somewhere that feels they've outgrown their surroundings, they're dreaming of STAR WARS, whether they call it STAR WARS. I think that's always been a big part of comics as well. Think about the popularity of the X-MEN. One day you wake up and find out that you were destined for greater things because you hit puberty. That's exactly what happens to Luke. He's a descendant of these incredible warriors who could tap into this mystic energy. I think that comics invented STAR WARS and STAR WARS almost reinvented comics. I think the two of them are very intrinsically combined.

"A horrible looking bum – turned out to be Clare Briggs."

FERD JOHNSON

Ferd Johnson's many decades in the comics industry can scarcely be sketched in a mere three-part interview — but that's what we've tried to do here. Only a few of his many acquaintances could be dealt with, and only a fraction of his vast experience. In this third part, Ferd continues to fill us in about his incredible stint on the MOON MULLINS newspaper strip and the many industry legends he's encountered on the way, and to give us his views on the current state of American comic strips . . .

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Photo: Ed Hooper

SHEL DORF: *My friend Ed McGeean went into a comic store in Burbank and the clerk said a guy was just in and bought Caniff's MALE CALL for the lady who was the model for Miss Lace. She was retiring from the Burbank Water and Power Company, where she'd worked all those years. And I said, "Ed, we've got to trace her down." Milt had just died six months before. Sure enough, we looked her up and called her. She was Dorothy Pardington, the Powers model who was chosen because she looked like the drawing of Miss Lace. She would go to Milt's studio when he lived in Rockland County and pose. Her mother made her dress, with the long black gloves and the gown and everything, and she said she also did some shows for the army. She said Milton was always too busy drawing TERRY AND THE PIRATES to go along with them, but she remembers Al Capp was with them. Her father was a policeman, and he took her to Milt's door and made sure that everything was on the up and up. When she would make public appearances for the USO, she was warned — they traveled by bus — don't let the cartoonists stop at any bars on the way. There was one time when they were driving by this bar and one of the guys said he'd left his hat there the day before. He was in there about 20 minutes. So another guy, I think it was Al Capp, said he'd go in and get him. So another 20 minutes went by.*

FERD JOHNSON: I think they drank so much because they had lots of time and most of them had lots of money and they could afford all this stuff. I remember one time some guy came up to the office — just a horrible looking bum — and it turned out to be **Clare Briggs.** He had bummed across the country, riding the rods. He just wanted to do it for the experience. He wanted to borrow five bucks to wire back to New York for some

Ferd poses with his son, Tom, who once worked as his assistant on MOON MULLINS. That shiny thing he's holding is his Inkpot Award, which was presented to him at San Diego in 1993.

"They're a different bunch. There's no businessman in them."

money. I was the only one there, so I gave him the five, and I've yet to be repaid! *(Laughter.)* He was an awful-looking bum! I couldn't imagine that a guy like him would do something like that.

SHEL: *Well, I finally met "Miss Lace." I did an interview with her and we ran it in the Cartoonists' Society newsletter. All this time she was in Burbank and Milt was in Palm Springs. If we had met earlier I know Milt would've gotten some publicity out of that.*

She had brought her scrapbook along. She was Miss Rheingold in the '40s. She had done a lot of advertising modeling.

FERD: Milt was sure a good artist. He was the best. He started a whole new style. And he told me somebody else taught him how to do that.

SHEL: *That was Noel Sickles, wasn't it?*

FERD: Yeah.

SHEL: *Milt's stuff was very linear until Sickles taught him the light-and-shadow technique. Milt always gave him credit for that. But Sickles never had the patience to stay with anything. He hated that deadline. Milt said when they shared a studio in Tudor City, New York, Sickles slept in the studio and went to Harlem for Jazz every night. He'd come back at four in the morning and sleep 'til noon. Then he'd do the strips and by 6 or 8 he'd go off to the nightclub again.*

He hated doing SCORCHY SMITH, but they've reprinted books of it and it looks just like early TERRY, with all that beautiful light and shadow.

FERD: They're a different bunch of guys. There's no businessman in them, I don't think.

SHEL: *Chet Gould was a businessman. Jean took me around the house in Woodstock and said, "This is the desk where Daddy worked on his stocks and bonds."*

FERD: Well, he made good money then. He had to do something with it. I never had any luck with that. This house is the only good investment I ever made. I paid

BUT, MISS LACE, MY REPUTATION'S AT STAKE! THERE'S BIG MONEY BET ON ME! COME ON, MISS LACE, GIVE A GUY A BREAK!
IT'S NO USE, GENERAL... I SIMPLY WILL NOT TELL YOU WHETHER 'LACE' IS MY FIRST OR LAST NAME!
MILTON CANIFF

$37,500 for it and one just like it next door just sold for $340,000! I tried to make money in the market, but I made a killing the first time I went into something and after that I lost everything. The only person I knew who was smart was **Frank King**. He did it in real estate. He went to Florida during that horrible Depression and bought up a hell of a lot of swamp land. Well, it turned out that's where Disney World is now! He gave **Bill Perry** an acre or so and now Bill's a millionnaire.

SHEL: *Jim Scancarelli should be asking you questions about Frank King, because even though he took over from Dick Moores, and tried to get the Moores style, he is very interested in the whole heritage of the strip. He's brought back characters King created, and when he went to Florida, King's son said, "I like what you're doing. The strip has turned into more of what my father's strip was like." A lot of people have said that. He even had a continuity where Skeezix's father had left him some land in Brazil. And he's used Rachel, the big black maid. Nowadays you couldn't draw somebody like that, but Jim has really kept on the heritage.*

FERD: He must be a pretty smart boy. I know **Dick Moores** told me about the guy. He said he's a comer. Dick was good, too. He had a lot on the ball.

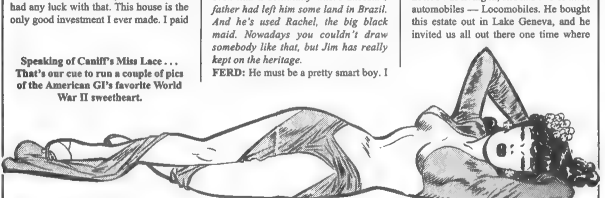
SHEL: *A great designer and a great draftsman. He loved the work.*

FERD: I was out here living in Beverly Hills at the time **Bill Perry** came out here. He was Frank's assistant then, and we grew up together. I used to go out with his wife before they were married. He came out to get Dick to come work for King, because Dick was working for Disney. So that's how they got together. **Perry** got the guy out and King liked him.

SHEL: *What kind of a routine did King have when he was still at the Tribune Tower?*

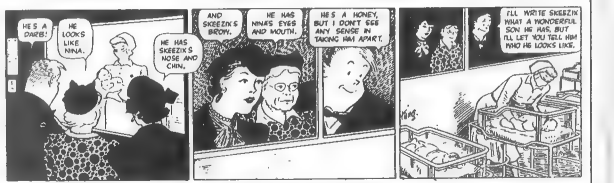
FERD: It varied every day he came down. He and **Sid Smith** worked in the old art department at the TRIBUNE when they were in the middle of the Loop there. But after THE GUMPS started making a hit, **Smith** went out. He had a palatial apartment right around the block from the hotel I was living in, and had two or three automobiles — Locomobiles. He bought this estate out in Lake Geneva, and he invited us all out there one time where

Speaking of Caniff's Miss Lace . . . That's our cue to run a couple of pics of the American GI's favorite World War II sweetheart.



Art this page copyright ©1944 Milton Caniff

"I colored WINNIE WINKLE. We colored the originals."


HE'S A DARB!
HE LOOKS LIKE NINA.
HE HAS SKEEZIX'S NOSE AND CHIN.
AND SKEEZIX'S BROW.
HE HAS NINA'S EYES AND MOUTH.
HE'S A HONEY, BUT I DON'T SEE ANY SENSE IN TAKING HIM APART.
I'LL WRITE SKEEZIX WHAT A WONDERFUL SON HE HAS, BUT I'LL LET YOU TELL HIM WHO HE LOOKS LIKE.
King.

As he states in these pages, Ferd's connection with the men behind GASOLINE ALLEY goes back to the beginning. Here are three of the writers/artists who have chronicled the adventures of the Wallet family. Above, creator Frank King, in a 1945 strip. The reason Grandpa Walt speaks of writing to Skeezix about his son's birth is because the latter was still off fighting World War II. The baby, by the way, is Chipper, who in the 1970s entered the medical profession. Below, a 1970s strip by King's successor, Dick Moores, who took the series to new heights following King's 1969 death. The 1970s GASOLINE ALLEY is currently being reprinted in COMICS REVUE. The panels at bottom are by Jim Scancarelli, who took over the strip when Moores died in 1986. Not represented here is King's early assistant, Bill Perry, also spoken of herein, who never had a solo run on the daily strip.

Pert lonely, Skeezix, with all that money to keep him company!
They say money talks, Nina, but I imagine the conversation gets dull after a while!
Why not have him to dinner? We could invite Jessica and Wilmer, too!
Fine!
Dick Moores
But we had Pert over not too long ago!
January 10, 1966! Pert has it duly noted in his little book!
© 1970 by The Chicago Tribune

they erected a statue of Andy Gump. Somebody told me it's still there.

SHEL: *It is still there. I have a postcard of it.*

FERD: I was pretty young and shy, but Sid came up to me and wanted to show me all over the place. That's the kind of guy **Sid Smith** was. I was just a punk kid. I kind of shied away from it. I was petrified at being with this great cartoonist.

I remember the first time I ever saw **Sid Smith:** I went to the can, and here's **Sid Smith** with his derby hat and cane at the urinal. *(Laughter.)* I was washing my hands, and I thought, "My God! Here I am doing the same thing **Sid Smith** is!"

SHEL: *He died in Lake Geneva, when his car ran off the road into a tree.*

FERD: He had just signed a million-dollar contract. He went out and celebrated, got in the Locomobile to go to Lake Geneva, and hit a telephone pole. It decapitated him.

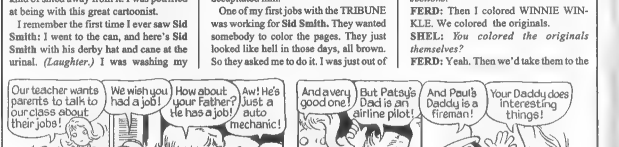
One of my first jobs with the TRIBUNE was working for **Sid Smith.** They wanted somebody to color the pages. They just looked like hell in those days, all brown. So they asked me to do it. I was just out of art school. I didn't know much about it, but I hated the dirty brown — all the colors printed on top of each other. So I separated them all. I used just primary colors, and the comic section just bloomed! It made a big impression.

SHEL: *And the TRIBUNE had some of the best printing I've seen of comic sections.*

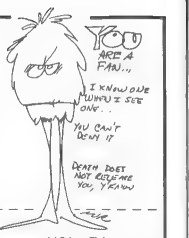
FERD: Then I colored WINNIE WINKLE. We colored the originals.

SHEL: *You colored the originals themselves?*

FERD: Yeah. Then we'd take them to the


Our teacher wants parents to talk to our class about their jobs!
We wish you had a job!
How about your Father? He has a job!
Aw! He's just a auto mechanic!
And a very good one!
But Patsy's Dad is an airline pilot!
And Paul's Daddy is a fireman!
Your Daddy does interesting things!

BECOME A VISIBLE FAN!



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"I think promotion is what strips need the most now."

BEACH BUMMER...
WHEW! I NEEDED THAT.
WHEN CAPT OSCAR SCHMALTZ RECEIVED A LETTER FROM HIS BANK SAYING THAT HIS GROSS SAVINGS SHRUNK FOR $1000.00 WHICH HE HAD CASHED FOR OUR NEW MILLIONS OF DOLLAR BILL THAN USELESS HE SHARPLY FOLDED UP HIS AN UMBRELLA AND PASSED OUT
WHATS THIS REPAIR JEWEL ARE WE ADOPTING THAT NOT WE WAS HERE WHEN I CAME HOME TO LUNCH I WASHED MY HAND DOWN AT THE SUMMER ANIMAL CRACKERS AND TO NIGHT WE IS STILL HERE
HE CAME OVER THIS MORNING, BARROOMS AND OF ALL THE SILLIEST THINGS I HAVE PUMPED OUT OF HIM ABOUT MISS SCHMALTZ'S HUSBAND'S HOME
OF COURSE IF YOU WANT ME TO RUN HIM OVER
WELL, YOUR OLD LADY SAYS IT'S TIME FOR ME TO BE ON MY WAY, DOC.
GOOD NIGHT, SAYS EVERYBODY IS WELL AT HOME I SUPPOSE
BY GOLLY DOC! THAT JUST REMINDS ME - ME BROUGHT SHE ME OVER TO TELL YOU THAT MISS SCHMALTZ'S UNCLE OSCAR THROWED A
Wilbert

Ben-day room. It took one guy all week to color one of these Sunday pages.

SHEL: *You'd figure out a percentage? Like, 60 percent of yellow and 20 percent of blue would make that certain green?*

FERD: Yes.

SHEL: *Ferd, your career runs practically the whole history of comic art in newspapers. You started maybe about 20 years into the whole scheme of things. How did they promote comic strips in the early days?*

FERD: Our syndicate would get out brochures of certain characters and strips and send them to the editors. And every week they'd be an ad in EDITOR AND PUBLISHER for one of these comics. They did that for years and years, and they built things up. They had about three salesmen to cover the whole country, which was quite a chore, but they did it. **Molly Slot** was assistant manager. She was one of the main promoters. She was good! She sold MOON all over the place.

SHEL: *Those were the days when every city had three or four newspapers.*

FERD: That's right. If they couldn't sell it here, they'd go across the street. It was easy pickings for the salesmen if they had anything on the ball at all.

I think promotion is what strips need the most now. A lot of them get it — some of the syndicates have full-page ads for some of these things — but very seldom do you see our syndicate have a full-page ad. Maybe once a year. Maybe they've got too many different things going now.

SHEL: *I know they have several television stations. Tribune Media owns the Joan Rivers television show. But don't you think the comic strip still has a lot to offer newspapers?*

FERD: I do, if they can get a good one. I think the new comic strips — well, I shouldn't say this —

SHEL: *Say it.*

FERD: I don't think they can compare to the old-timers.

SHEL: *I agree, and I don't know why this is.*

FERD: I don't know either. There are a few good ones. Maybe three or four of the new ones out of the past ten years I think are worth a damn: FOR BETTER OR WORSE, CALVIN . . .

SHEL: *You're right. It's kind of slim pickings. What do you think of the changes from the days when the illustrative continued strips were the popular ones? Now it's just a gag-a-day strips.*

FERD: Well, there are a lot of story strips now, but I can't get interested in them. You can go to the TV set and get a whole story, but in a comic strip you have to wait a month for something to develop. But I'm not knocking them, because I think they have some very good ones. There are great artists, but I don't think there are any **Milton Caniffs**, or any PRINCE VALIANTs.

SHEL: *Do you think times are faster now? That an artist can't take time to put in all those loving strokes?*

FERD: I don't think they have the talent that they used to have. Most of them can't draw. But it doesn't matter if they have good ideas. You can take a couple of toothpicks and have them talking to each other, and if they're funny they'll go. But there aren't that many funny people anymore. No more **Red Skeltons** and that type. There are a couple of programs that are funny, THE GOLDEN GIRLS, I love. I think that would make a great strip.

SHEL: *It would, wouldn't it? Yeah, that's a great idea!*

FERD: If I was starting out again, I don't know what I would do. I think it would still be a gag a day. I like making a point in one day.

SHEL: *You were able to get the gag down to three panels, too. It originally was four panels. Were you cramped at all in getting the gag in three panels?*

FERD: No, I liked that, because you had more room to draw in then. With four panels you're cramped, so you can't put good drawing in.

"A gag-a-day thing is tough to make a movie out of."

SHEL: *In the last few years, has the syndicate given you any specific instructions?*

FERD: No, they never have.

SHEL: *Have you had much contact with the syndicate?*

FERD: No. I stopped going back to New York, and I seldom heard from them. The only time I'd hear from them is when I'd do something I shouldn't have, like having a sexist gag in there that they didn't like, and so I'd change it or they'd discard it. But I think on the whole we were friendly enough — from a distance.

SHEL: *How old are you, Ferd?*

FERD: I'm 85.

SHEL: *That's 20 years longer than the average man works.*

FERD: Most people work 20 years and they retire.

SHEL: *And they get a gold watch or something, but you have something visual to show for all those years.*

FERD: It's been fun. It's a great job. I thought it was so good, it was going to go on forever!

SHEL: *You should think of writing your book now. And publishing a collection of the great MOON MULLINS strips.*

FERD: Well, if it would be interesting. I don't know if I could make it interesting or not — get enough good strips in there.

SHEL: *Did they ever think of making a movie or an animated film about MOON?*

FERD: Yeah, they put up a lot of money when **Willard** was around. They gave him $15,000 for the rights, but it petered out. **Alan Hale** was going to be Moon, and **Mickey Rooney** was supposed to be Kayo. I think it's not a strip that would lend itself to a story much. A gag-a-day thing is tough to make a movie out of.

SHEL: *How did you learn that your strip was ending after all these years?*

FERD: I got a sharp letter from **Bob Reed** saying the TRIBUNE was dropping MOON and there was no way they could continue it with the income it was bringing in. And then I got a letter from the editor of the TRIBUNE that said they were sorry but that was the final decision.

SHEL: *How many papers did you have?*

FERD: At the most, 350. I don't know what they had in the last few years. I thought it was around a hundred. I think the syndicate has to get at least around $500 a week coming in or they're not interested. It takes them that much money to get this thing out.

SHEL: *Toward the end of Chester Gould's career, it became a chore for him. His grandson told me there were times he came downstairs and said he just didn't want to do DICK TRACY that day. But when Marshall Field was raiding the TRIBUNE for his new Chicago Sun Syndicate, Gould said absolutely not. I understand Field's representatives contacted Zack Mosley and Harold Gray to come over.*

FERD: But none of them could, because the TRIBUNE owned the copyrights. They couldn't take their strips.

SHEL: *That's true. But when their contracts ran out, and he knew when their contracts ran out, he wanted them to start new strips. And Caniff was the only one who did that. Mill told me Field asked him, "What would you want?" Caniff said, "Two things: ownership and complete editorial control." Field said "You've got it" and ordered drinks. I think TERRY had a year to run, and they had to keep it top secret.*

Zack Mosley, in a letter, said he had been goofing off and the strip wasn't that great anymore. He had gone through a divorce and was on the skids, and he got this letter renewing his contract for another 15 years or something, and couldn't understand what was going on. It was they were afraid Field was going to get him.

FERD: **Stan Lynde** wanted rights to his strip and they wouldn't give them to him. So he jumped over to the other guys with LATIGO, which flopped. And RICK O'SHAY was a very successful strip. So

EVERYBODY SEEMS TO'VE SEEN OUR NEW NEIGHBOR BUT ME
HAHA! THAT LOVELY GIRL NEXT DOOR MUST THINK I'M A BUM—
WELL?
SHE ASKED ME IF I WOULD LIKE TO DO SOME ODD JOBS FOR HER TODAY— HA! HA! HA!
WELL, WAIT TILL THE LITTLE LADY SEES HER NEW HOME HANDY MAN! REPORT FOR DUTY!
YEH.
MOON MULLINS
A GOOD BOOK ALWAYS HELPS WHILE AWAY THE LONELY HOURS FOR A NIGHT WATCHMAN
"MURDERS IN THE COUNTY MORGUE"
by Billy THE KID Levinson.
"AND THEN CREEPING THROUGH THE INKY NIGHT—" UGH!
GO ON BACK TO SLEEP, MR. VAN DAZZLE - AS LONG AS I KNOW I GOT COMPANY THESE MURDER MYSTERIES DON'T BOTHER ME.

"Disney was a charming person. I'd heard just

Art on this and facing pages copyright ©2004 Ferd Johnson

that was a bad move on his part.

SHEL: *Yes, it was. But Chet always felt a loyalty to the syndicate. Flash forward to 1977 — somebody said Gould was getting senile and they wanted to retire him. So they said, "Mr. Gould, we're sorry, but we're going to have to retire you." He said, "No, you're not." He went into his safe and found this contract from 1946 that said he could do it as long as he wanted to. Jean said they had to pay him a pretty penny to retire. I interviewed him about a year later and he said he loved his retirement and was having a good time. But after those 46 years, he had severe back problems from leaning over the drawing board. Milton used to pull the board forward to keep his back straight, and sort of worked on his back. How did you work?*

FERD: I worked with the board on the table. Those boards I have are antiques. **Billy DeBeck** was on one of them for 20 or 30 years, and I worked on that one for years. Now I'm having trouble painting — pain in the back of my neck. So I've got to get a collar or something, or stop painting.

SHEL: *Jean said Chet's back was so bad, he used to lie on the floor and have her stand on it. Then the pain got so bad he had trouble walking upstairs to the bedroom. He slept in a recliner chair instead of his bed. It was such a good night's rest, he got a second one for Edna, and they put them side by side!*

FERD: *(Laughter.)* That's cute!

SHEL: *Seeing this house, filled with these beautiful watercolors, I know the Ferd Johnson art is still continuing, though maybe not being seen by millions anymore. You look in great shape, and you seem to be a happy guy.*

FERD: I love what I'm doing! I've often thought that if I started again, I'd paint.

SHEL: *How long have you been doing watercolor and oil?*

FERD: I started when my wife talked me into going down to a **Norman Rockwell** class — the only class he ever had. He came out to the Otis Institute and wanted a place to work, so they said, "If you teach one class a week for the summer, we'll give you the place to work." I didn't want to paint; I just wanted to learn something about drawing. Well, I sure as hell did! He was a wonderful person! We saw him paint four or five POST covers from the very start. He'd use little sketches, then he'd call in models, call in the cameraman. He was way up in the ceiling shooting down and all sorts of things — probably took a hundred pictures for every POST cover. But we saw the whole

the opposite from guys who worked there."

works, and it got me very interested.

One day, he asked me what I did, and I told him I was a cartoonist. He wanted to see some of my stuff, so I brought in some TEXAS SLIMs and he looked them over very carefully and said, "Ferd, for anybody who can draw like this, you're wasting your time being a cartoonist." That put the bug in my head. Well, **Willard** died right after that and I didn't have time to fool with it. I was doing a Sunday page of my own *and* **Willard's** stuff with no help. So I put it off for a couple of years, until Tom got back from Korea and started helping me. Then I studied with this guy from Czechoslovakia who had worked with **Renoir** and **Utrillo** and all those guys, so I had good instruction. And I was fairly successful around the galleries. I don't know if it was the idea that I was a cartoonist, but people bought my paintings.

SHEL: *What year was this, when Rockwell was out here?*

FERD: I think around '57. **Willard** died in '58.

SHEL: *Why was Rockwell so down on cartooning?*

FERD: I found out later that he'd wanted to be a cartoonist himself and couldn't cut it! *(Laughter.)*

SHEL: *I understand you also knew Walt Disney.*

FERD: Sort of. Tom, my son, went to Stanford when **Walt Disney's** son-in-law went up there. They'd come down here for a few days off — vacations or weekends — and I'd go to the airport to pick up Tom with my wife, and **Walt Disney** would go up there to pick up his son-in-law. I introduced myself to him and we had a lot of long talks, depending on how the plane was running — if the plane was late, we had a long talk.

SHEL: *What was Disney like?*

FERD: He was a charming person. Now, I'd heard just the opposite from guys who worked there. They were scared to death of him. They almost had to tip their hat when he came around. But I didn't find him that way at all. He was just friendly, and his wife was, too.

He told me all about Disneyland, which he was going to be opening up. I couldn't imagine why he'd go way down here in Anaheim — the outskirts of California — to start something like that, but he did a lot of investigating, he said, and he got a lot of advice as to how the population was going, so he went out and did this. He told me about the different things he had there, and one time I came down there with some friends when it first opened, and **Disney** was out there like a greeter, greeting everybody who came in! He took us around and showed us every exhibit. He wanted to find out what people liked about it. My favorite was that big hippopotamus and the Lincoln thing.

SHEL: *Well, Ferd, thank you so much for sharing such wonderful memories with us.*

FERD: I enjoyed, it, Shel. We covered a lot of territory!

Following his successful career as a cartoonist, Ferd is now trying his hand at oil painting. Above: "Marine Avenue, Balboa Island." Facing page, top to bottom: "Harbor Island Bridge," "Poppy at Fourth," and "Grand Canal." This black-and-white reproduction does little justice to the soft colors of these impressionistic works.

"I started with REBEL ASSAULT. It was not supposed

VINCE LEE

A revolution began in 1977. The possibilities had been touched on a few times before, such as in Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY (1968), but it wasn't until 1977 that a couple of fellows named Spielberg and Lucas married the high tech approach to cinematic science fiction, the big budget approach to popular culture. CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND and STAR WARS changed everything. It may seem an outrageous claim, but almost every form of entertainment has undergone some transformation, together with some advancement of technology, since those two films premiered.

And today, 11 years since RETURN OF THE JEDI, the phenomenon of STAR WARS continues, growing each year even without new installments in the film series, expanding with the exploration of the new realms of entertainment. Like computer games . . .

DARREL L. BOATZ: *How did you get started in computer programming and game design?*

VINCE LEE: That's kind of an interesting story because I didn't really start off in computer programming. I went to UC-Berkeley in Mechanical Engineering — I got both my graduate and undergraduate degrees there. I specialized in, of all things, robotics and

to be a big deal, just to branch into a CD-ROM title."

control systems. But while I was a student there I had an Amiga and . . . I guess it was in '86 when I first got my machine and started programming it. So, all the while I was going to school, I was earning money doing contract work programming. I wrote a couple of small projects, and wrote a little bit to to go with a bunch of *other* programs. When I graduated from Cal and was looking for a job I came to LucasArts — as an Amiga programmer I had met one of the producers here, and he had suggested I should give him a call when I graduated. So, I did, and it turned into the job I have now.

DARREL: *Looking at the material I've got from the company, you mentioned REBEL ASSAULT is your first original project.*

VINCE: Yeah, I started REBEL ASSAULT about two years ago. I was doing a number of other things at the time, then management gave me the opportunity to do an original game. So, I started off doing REBEL ASSAULT and it was not *supposed* to be a big deal at first, just something to branch out into CD-ROM with a CD-ROM title. It was both mine and the company's . . . it's many *firsts* for all of us. As the game came together it got bigger and bigger, more and more exciting, and now it's come out and went gold in its first week, that's over 100,000 copies! That's very *large* in the computer industry, *especially* in the CD-ROM market — it's doing phenomenally well!

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Vince Lee
Born: Concord, CA — 1967
Occupation: Programmer/Designer at LucasArts
Credits: I started at LucasArts as the Amiga programmer. I did Amiga conversions of our adventure games, MONKEY ISLAND and INDIANA JONES IV; wrote tools for our in-house adventure system; REBEL ASSAULT is my first original project, a CD-ROM project.

DARREL: *I'm not really familiar with CD-ROM; the high tech end of this is kind of leaving me behind. What is this exactly, this CD-ROM, that makes it like the next wave or whatever?*

VINCE: A lot of people have really been misled about what CD-ROM really offers. CD-ROM is really just a storage medium. In a way it's a lot like a very large floppy disk. Now, of course, when you go to design a game there are a lot of limitations you normally face. You face obvious limitations in how much you can afford as far as manpower, how much art you can generate, how fast the computer you're going to be running is, and what kind of programming you are going to be able to do, what you're going to be able to do in calculations. And the final limitation, certainly, is how much you can fit on a disk. For instance, if you're going to do an adventure game the tendency is you want to have many locations to go to, so the player doesn't have to keep walking around in the same areas.

If you're playing an arcade game you can have lots of different art and imagery so that, for example in a driving game, you don't have to drive your car down the same street over and over again. You run into two limitations for that; you have to pay an artist to *generate* those locations, that's a *cost* limitation; and the other is that you have a definite limit in your storage capacity. In a floppy disk game you have a limit in how many floppies you can put in a box, because the more floppies the more costly the game is. What CD-ROM offers — say, typically, a floppy disk might hold compressed two megabytes of data — on a CD-ROM you can store 600 megabytes of data. It takes *away* the limitation that you run into, at least for many games, of your delivery medium.

Of course, your *other* limitations are still there; it's still *costly* to generate data and so on. So, that's all CD-ROM really is, it's like a very large floppy disk. It enables game designers to design games with more graphics, maybe even video. REBEL ASSAULT has actual animation

STAR WARS "Galaxy" trading cards from Topps — here, artwork by fan favorite Sam Kieth (right) and CONCRETE creator Paul Chadwick (left). Chris Sprouse's b&w art is on the previous page.

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"We make fewer titles, but we have a reputation

scenes scanned right off the STAR WARS movies. And better music since we're using the John Williams soundtrack. None of that would have been possible on floppy disks.

DARREL: *Yes, that's one of the things right on the first page of the press release, that the game art is "rendered in camera perfect perspective," 3-D modeling techniques — it sounds almost like it's a mini-movie or something.*

VINCE: It is, in a way. Typically, the way old computer games were done, they were all drawn by hand. An artist would draw backgrounds in the computer, very much like painting, or they would draw it on paper and then scan it *into* the computer and touch it up there. But, as I said, with REBEL ASSAULT we could generate that much more imagery, but it's not cost effective to really have an artist sit there and hand animate everything in the game. That would have been an enormous labor cost. But here we have the opportunity to try new technology. And I think, on the PC platform at least, there are packages that didn't used to exist before . . . they're pretty much *extensions* of CAD programs. You build your objects much as you would in a CAD program. You build in 3-D and then you lay your textures and colors on them, light your scenes, and then you can actually do animation in this kind of virtual world.

DARREL: *I saw on television the other day an advertisement for a game. They have actors now playing scenes for these games.*

VINCE: Yes, that's certainly a *trend* for a certain number of games. REBEL ASSAULT had that in a limited fashion. We had professional voice actors do the voices, and we have a couple of scenes where we actually *do* have new actors involved, but for the most part the imagery is either 3-D or taken from the movie. You don't want to do *bad* video, which is the tendency . . . video brings a whole new world of *problems* that we don't have the expertise yet to deal with, I mean in general the game industry does not. If you look at some of the initial products out there with video, some of the video is pretty *cheesy* video. We *don't*

within the industry for turning out quality products."

want to do that! **George Lucas** doesn't want us to do that. We'll enter that arena when we can do it well.

DARREL: *Right. I've noticed that the Lucas companies, especially with the STAR WARS material, there's a quality attitude you seem to be adhering to.*

VINCE: Oh, definitely, quality *first.* That's a feeling that's really promoted throughout the company. We don't want to turn out anything bad, so we may not make as *many* titles as some other companies. Some companies are very prolific. We make fewer titles, but we have a reputation within the industry for turning out quality products. A lot of emphasis is placed on maintaining that reputation, because we wouldn't want to *hurt* the STAR WARS or INDIANA JONES licenses by turning out bad games. So, as much as possible we try to keep quality first.

DARREL: *In these STAR WARS games — let's take REBEL ASSAULT — What's the basic game setup here? And . . . well, it seems in a lot of these you have space battles and so on, so how do you keep the games from becoming repetitive?*

VINCE: Ah, yes. Well, REBEL ASSAULT is an arcade game, but unlike some other arcade games it does actually have a *story* behind it. The story is a *good* story because it's basically STAR WARS, or a story that runs *parallel* to STAR WARS for the most part. You start off as a rookie pilot in training, then you progress through the ranks going from scene to scene, scenario to scenario, as you face the Empire. The thing that makes REBEL ASSAULT non-repetitive is that as you progress from level to level your scenery changes, the game play changes — it becomes a *different* game; every level is completely different. You don't see repetitive imagery, and as the story changes you do different things. I think that's the real strength of the game, something you don't see in normal arcade

Top illustrators on Topps cards, clockwise from far left: Ted Boonthanakit (Princess Leia), Joe Smith (Emperor Palpatine), Ralph McQuarrie (conceptual), Thomas Wm. Yeates II (Luke Skywalker), George Evans (Lando Calrissian), Ken Stacy (Womp Rats & Luke), George Perez (Gamorrean guard), Allen Nunis (Boba Fett), Paul Gulacy (Mercenaries), animation cel from the STAR WARS HOLIDAY SPECIAL by Nelvana Studios.

"REBEL ASSAULT is a seat of your pants fly and shoot game."

games. Because of CD-ROM we're not *forced* by space limitations to make you come back to the same location over and over again.

DARREL: *Okay. What was your involvement in the X-WING game, if any?*

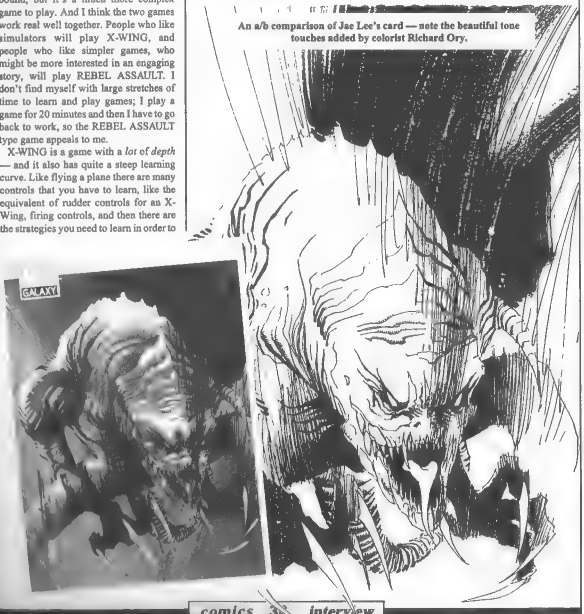
VINCE: Actually, I wasn't involved in X-WING. X-WING was developed by **Larry Holland** and his team. **Larry Holland** developed a line of flight simulator games for LucasArts; he was originally in-house and now he works in conjunction with us. Whereas REBEL ASSAULT is purely a story-based arcade game, X-WING actually evolves from the flight simulator side. It's less story bound, but it's a much more complex game to play. And I think the two games work real well together. People who like simulators will play X-WING, and people who like simpler games, who might be more interested in an engaging story, will play REBEL ASSAULT. I don't find myself with large stretches of time to learn and play games; I play a game for 20 minutes and then I have to go back to work, so the REBEL ASSAULT type game appeals to me.

X-WING is a game with a *lot* of *depth* — and it also has quite a steep learning curve. Like flying a plane there are many controls that you have to learn, like the equivalent of rudder controls for an X-Wing, firing controls, and then there are the strategies you need to learn in order to complete certain missions. REBEL ASSAULT is much more a seat of your pants fly and shoot game. So, I think it's two different audiences, although I'm sure you'll probably find a fair number of people who will play both games.

DARREL: *I read in one of the computer magazines that the gaming industry seems to be heading towards something that they don't really have a language for yet, interactive programming that's not quite games, heading towards movies but not quite movies.*

VINCE: Yeah, I've heard that, but as the saying goes: If you don't know where you're going then you're not going to know when you get there. *(Laughter.)* I think, just my own personal feelings, a lot of that is hype. If you look at everything they call virtual reality today, multimedia and all those buzz words, it's pretty much an extension of what we in the gaming industry have been doing for years, which is just improving the sound, improving the graphics. You look at some of the *initial* efforts in games and you'll see that what the designers had in mind is already what they are *now* considering the future, just the interactive play field didn't have the technology to do it. Now that they do people are getting closer and closer to it.

But, as far as the interaction with the movies, I think there is *some* limited potential for games there, but I don't



An a/b comparison of Jae Lee's card — note the beautiful tone touches added by colorist Richard Ory.

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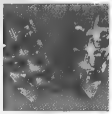

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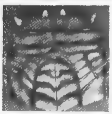

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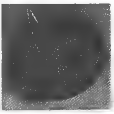

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"I myself was never a huge STAR WARS fanatic."

think we're really going to come up with anything. Someone has to sit down and figure it out, come up with an idea and say, "Okay, *if* we had all the technology we would need, *this* is what I would want."

DARREL: *You're more just surfing the wave of advancing technology.*

VINCE: Yeah. Take, for example, early driving games. If you talked to a game designer years ago, asked him what his idea of the *perfect* driving game would be, he would pretty much have said he would want the graphics to run so it looks exactly like what you would see in an actual car, see the cars roaring by, see the details on the ground and all the cars from correct perspective, and with the freedom of movement to take any turn you want, and so on. Then he would have to design the game and he would look at his technology and, say, make it at night so the graphics won't be as demanding, have cone lights to represent the edge of the road, do stuff like that. But he could tell you *instantly* what he's *aiming* for.

If you asked him today what would be the perfect driving game, he would have difficulty telling you. It might be interacting with other people just like in real life, having conversations. But how would you do this, how would the technology fit into this? If you really want to go around and interact with people, should you film people saying canned things to you, does that get you any closer to your goal? Or should you instead be trying to *simulate* people and try to have the artificial computer intelligence behave like a real person? I can't answer that. *(Laughter.)* But nobody seems to be moving in that particular direction, and it seems to me that's the direction in which you would *have* to move if you wanted real virtual reality, interacting with virtual characters.

DARREL: *With virtual reality it still seems to be at the stage of exploring the basic potential.*

VINCE: Yeah. But the whole thing about interactive movies, I think it's a lot fuzzier than most people think.

DARREL: *So, you would have been what, nine years old when the first STAR WARS film came out?*

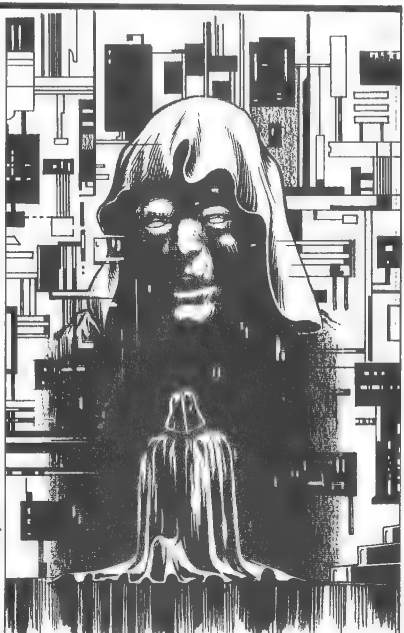
VINCE: *(Laughter.)* Oh, I'm showing how young I am. Actually, to let you know how young I *really* was, I didn't even *see* STAR WARS when it came out the first time. I didn't see it until it was rereleased two years later. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *It must have made some kind of impression on you, though.*

VINCE: I thought it was absolutely great. But the funny thing was that when I saw it I really didn't have a whole lot to compare it to. I hadn't seen anything, really, before then, so I just thought, "Oh, this is how movies are!" Of course, afterwards there were dozens of STAR WARS rip-offs, and I could certainly tell that they were much worse. *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *So is this like a childhood dream to be working with STAR WARS?*

VINCE: You know, you can't *beat* what I do for a living — I make *games* for a living! It's being paid for having fun, that's what it is. I won't say there aren't long hours and a lot of hard work, but still usually I'm doing something that I enjoy, which is being creative. And working on STAR WARS is just the icing on the cake. I myself was never a huge STAR WARS fanatic, really. For awhile as a kid I was a big STAR TREK fan, and I certainly did enjoy all of George Lucas's movies. And



Darth Vader speaks with his master, Emperor Palpatine — by Wes Craig (Topps).

"On a computer you can build sets that

the company is a great company to work for. Did you expect me to say, "Oh, I wanted to work here all of my life, blah blah blah!" *(Laughter.)*

DARREL: *Well, maybe not that exactly.*

VINCE: I didn't really expect to end up here. I know some people who would absolutely kill to work here, or for ILM or whatever, but I didn't, and I think *most* of the people who get hired here don't.

DARREL: *Well, you mentioned earlier that you started out in robotics, and robotics seemed to be such a big part of those films I thought maybe there was a connection there.*

Salacious Crumb, by long-time comics artist Mike Zeck.

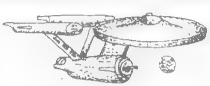
you couldn't *possibly* build in real life."

VINCE: No, there really wasn't. I never really used my robotics.
DARREL: *Okay. There's been some information released that a new trilogy of STAR WARS films is slated, and I would be remiss in my duties if I didn't open up that subject. What do you know, or what do you hear?*
VINCE: I don't know anything special, just what everyone else knows. I think it is common knowledge now that there are new movies coming. We don't get any special information here. We're Lucas-Arts and we are affiliated with LucasFilm, but I don't know any details about the new film projects.
DARREL: *Something that amazes me is there hasn't been a new STAR WARS film out . . . I don't remember when the last one came out, '82, '83?*
VINCE: And all of a sudden there are STAR WARS movies and an INDIANA JONES movie.
DARREL: *What's amazing is the momentum carried through all those years.*
VINCE: Well, you figure the technology — when did JEDI come out? It's been a *decade* since that movie came out, but you watch JEDI today and the ships flying by *still* give you that same rush of excitement. What are they going to do ten years later? What's it going to look like, how much *more* real is it going to feel? What can they do now that they couldn't do back then?
DARREL: *Yeah. There must be some kind of pressure to do better.*
VINCE: My guess — certainly they are going to be able to do things they couldn't do before, and make more complex shots. The problem would be to be able to do the same things *cheaper*. In REBEL ASSAULT all of the models are on computer — I think we're going to maybe see that technology used on the big screen. On a computer you can build sets that you couldn't *possibly* build in real life because they would be too tremendously expensive. You can digitally have incredibly complex vast scenes. You know how they used to make matte paintings, and if they wanted motion they would have to cut a little hole and insert something in there.
DARREL: *Right, because it's a static image.*
VINCE: Yeah. Well, on a computer you can make a giant city and have everything moving, the traffic way off in the distance, and it won't be a problem.
DARREL: *Sounds great if it works. The problem would be making it look real on that huge movie screen.*

Gamorrean Guard, by Rich Hedden.

VINCE: Well, if anyone can do it, **George Lucas** and ILM can do it.
DARREL: *Well, what's in the future in games?*
VINCE: *(Laughter.)* I think that's kind of a loaded question. *(Laughter.)* I don't think there's *one* future. It's not going to be movies, or it's not going to be *just* movies, it's not going to be *just* virtual reality or just this or just that. I think we're going to see games that are faster, more realistic, more engaging; some more complex, some simpler, depending on the audience. Pretty much the same that we

ADULT COSTUMES



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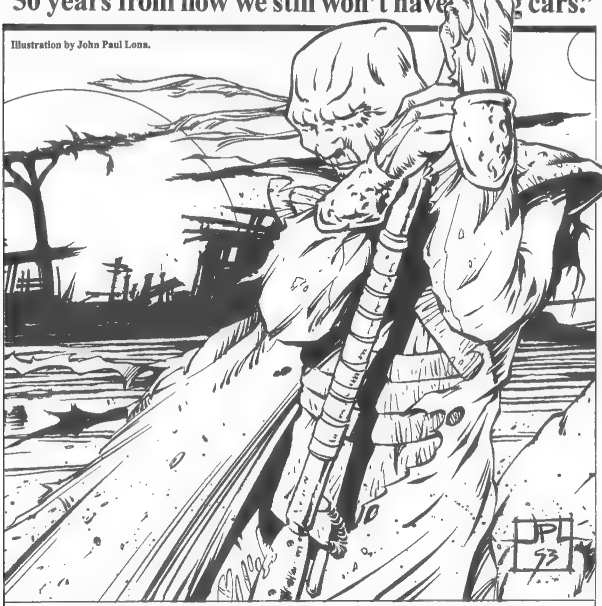

Illustration by John Paul Lona.

have right now, just better!

DARREL: *One thing that occurred to me, with the capabilities presented by fiber optics, eventually you might be able to have people all over the country hooking up into one game.*

VINCE: Yes, I'm glad you brought that up, multi-player games and networks and the whole information highway thing. I think that is something that *will* probably change the face of gaming. You take a simple game like STREET FIGHTER 2, what's its strength? You play it one-person it's so-so, but you play it two-people and it's *great!* You're not interacting with some computer-generated guy, you're interacting with a real person Real people are complex and they have personalities. Well, when I think we get that kind of network going you will see things like massive strategic war games, all the players commanding fleets or whatever. People are doing that now, but they will be doing that on a much larger scale.

DARREL: *Sounds like a whole new world.*

VINCE: I think so. I think we're at a good time, actually, to see it begin.

DARREL: *In my lifetime, I remember the first time I saw a computer game, you just sat down at the keyboard — it was a STAR TREK game — and you didn't even have any graphics to speak of.*

VINCE: Yeah, I remember that.

DARREL: *Very simple, but it was a beginning.*

VINCE: Yeah, I liked that game.

DARREL: *That was my whole point, just how far things have come in such a short time, 20 years or whatever it's been.*

VINCE: Yeah, where's it going to be 20 years from now? You know, the funny thing is when science fiction writers 20 or 30 years ago were asked to predict the future, they had us driving helicopters to work, that sort of thing. *(Laughter.)* All the things having to do with large scale engineering never really go as fast as people think it will, you know — 50 years from now we still won't have flying cars. But the *incredible* thing is *nobody* predicted how fast computers would advance, the small scale advancing technology. It's still progressing at an enormous rate.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE DIRECT MARKET

Dear CI:

Before every comic retailer in the nation begins applauding the recent tightening of cancellation policies by direct market distributors and/or starts endorsing retailer-columnist **Brian Hibbs'** recent call for *all* publishers to immediately institute (and be forced to adhere to) weekly shipping schedules, allow me to aim a double-barreled dose of reality in your general direction.

• Barrel One: Few if any of the true independent publishers currently serving the direct market (herein defined as the 170 or so companies fighting for the 15% market share left over by the industry's true majors) will be able to meet the ever tightening performance standards created by your demands.

• Barrel Two: Minus the broad range of texture and choice imparted to the direct market by the industry's 170 undercapitalized and generally unpredictable and woefully unreliable independent publishers (and, yes, there is a cause and effect at work between the "under" part and the two "un"s that follow), the need for a specialty market served by comic retailers ceases to exist.

The only publishers large enough to dictate schedules to the handful of printers who seek or even desire comic-book work (itself a specialty) are the top 15 or so who presently dominate the field. The remaining 170 are generally at the mercy of their printer and other suppliers, not vice versa. Our hollow threats to take business elsewhere are met with a shrug, a yawn or a chuckle, as the volume of books we individually print merits no greater response. That's how you know you're an independent.

It is very important that retailers and distributors grasp this basic publishing reality before they shoot themselves in the foot once and forever. The vast majority of independents do not dictate anything to anyone, but are instead dictated to and are firmly at the mercy of everything that affects the market. That singular inability to make demands on anyone — underpaid artists, distributors, printers, etc. — is what separates independents from majors.

As distributors begin responding to retailer complaints by demanding greater consistency and on-time performance from publishers, those publishers who possess sufficient clout will pass on these demands to their well-paid employees *and* highly responsive suppliers. Those suppliers *will* respond to the demands of these few highly regarded customers.

In cases where those suppliers are the same ones shared by a smaller independent, the scheduling of the smaller publisher's work will only be further delayed to accommodate the increasing demands of the larger customer. This is inevitable. It is also inevitable that *all* customers *cannot* be large customers. What you have undertaken will serve only to push aside the needs of the many in order to better serve the increased needs of the precious few, who *are* precious *because* they are few. The problem of late-shipping books for the many will only be exacerbated by shorter cancellation windows.

Unfortunately, the current trend toward tighter cancellation windows presupposes the existence of an infinite number of suppliers serving publisher needs. This type of thinking could not be more incorrect, and it is sad to realize that the same retailers who complain about a lack of service from the limited number of distributors in the industry somehow came to believe that greater choices exist for publishers.

They do not, and exactly how wrong that thinking is will become apparent this June, when Diamond tightens its cancellation window to either 30 or 45 days (and you can toss out Diamond's lip service about "understanding publisher concerns" over this policy — it will be adopted). In a world of finite resources, not everyone can be first in line. Unfortunately, only those who *are* first in line will have any realistic chance of delivering their product inside Diamond's 30- or 45-day window.

New printers will not suddenly spring forth in an attempt to meet the demands of the many small publishers clamoring for immediate service. All of our books combined don't equal the number of books published by DC in any given month. We're hardly talking about the kind of volume needed to create a new cadre of comic-book printers willing and able to handle the overflow of panic-stricken independents that Diamond's policy will create. Instead, the many will be forced to simultaneous clamor at the doors of our existing suppliers. Some will gain entry — the vast majority will not.

As the number of independents shipping late skyrockets past the number able to ship on time, Diamond's ability to handle late books as fully returnable will be rapidly overburdened. When that happens, Diamond and any other distributors who follow its lead (which all must) will be forced to cancel sales of late-shipping books. A sizeable number of independents now serving the direct market will then cease to exist.

"Great!" some of you are thinking. "Who the hell needs you people anyway?" Well, quite frankly — *you* do — and you need us warts and all. Bear in mind that it was the sudden proliferation of independent publishers during what is now derisively called the "black and white glut" of an earlier generation that led to the existence of today's direct market. Independents created you, and the unpredictable, unreliable and sometimes unprofitable books produced by independents are the only reason you continue to exist. Perhaps this concept is a bit hard to grasp during these tough times, but without our vast, unpredictable and currently unwanted numbers inside your stores, there is very little need for you.

Worse yet, by the time your increasing demands for efficiency are finally met, the two dozen or so companies able to consistently comply with those demands will also have no need for you. You will have unwittingly created a small army of mini-Marvels, all producing popular, high-volume mainstream books on a clockwork-like schedule refined to the absolute nth degree. But two dozen publishers printing similar books in a highly predictable and like manner are hardly the stuff of which a specialty market is created or sustained.

The only companies left inside the comic specialty market will be those who need it the least, for they will be almost exclusively of the type (big and popular) who either can, will or historically have supplied the much larger newsstand, bookstore and general retail (Kmart, drug store, etc.) marketplace. As their ability to unfailingly ship predictable product on rigid weekly schedules grows with every passing month (as your increasing demands ensure that it must), the need for "specialty" outlets to handle this mass-

market fodder will geometrically decrease.

As readers discover that they can purchase virtually the same titles carried by you at damn near any store with a good-sized magazine rack, their weekly treks to your specialty store will slowly dwindle and eventually disappear.

As an industry, the direct market's only remaining draw card will be the much-touted "no-return" policy that has governed it for the past decade or so. But a no-return policy coupled with a draconian late-shipping policy isn't much of a draw, and the need to print separate non-bar-coded covers to satisfy the demands of a handful of specialty stores negates that remaining advantage in its entirety. Let's face facts — any publisher strong and large enough to consistently ship all of its titles inside a 30-day window is strong enough to compete in a much larger marketplace where returnable product has always been the rule — and where the people who run that show know how to handle returns in a timely and cost-effective manner (not exactly a direct market specialty, is it?).

Ask yourself this question: Viewed in light of the far larger marketplace where full returns are the norm, and now forced by members of the direct market to adopt the same tight and predictable scheduling that is also the norm in that marketplace, why would any of the powerful, re-mailing comic publishers give a damn about the needs of so 3,500 specialty retailers whose self-serving policies sacrificed the only thing that ever made them special in the first place? Oh, and what is it that made the direct market comic retailer so special? Believe it or not, it might just be the vast variety of titles from a vast source of independent publishers that you are now doing your best to destroy.

You — the retailers, retailer-columnists and distributors of this industry — have embarked on a course that will eventually negate your very reason for being. You as comic specialty retailers have only one niche that you can and do fill. The ability of a comic buyer to walk in your store and find a Raging Rhino title on the shelf is the *only* thing that sets you apart from the drug store down the street. Period. If you are setting out to create a marketplace in which only the largest mainstream suppliers can survive, and if you are doing so with full knowledge of what you've begun, then Raging Rhino and many like us wish you the very best of luck. Fear not for our welfare — another outlet will develop for our products — just as you yourselves developed for an earlier generation of independents.

If, however, you do not know or have not considered the full ramifications of the policies you've adopted or plan to adopt in the near future, then now is the time to give this matter the contemplation it deserves. The independents who serve your market do so because we currently serve no other. Without us, those who can serve other markets will not serve you.

An old bit of poker-playing advice goes like this: Look around the table and find the victim. If you can't tell who it is, it's you. Start looking around, folks — you're dealing yourselves a losing hand.

Lance Jacobs
Head Honcho
Raging Rhino Productions
2411 Arthur St.
Hollywood, FL 33020

THE CONDEMNED MAN'S LAST WORD (WHO HAS THE BIGGER PENIS?)

Dear DAK:

Yikes! I just got around to reading *The "People" Vs. Jeph Loeb, The Verdict: Guilty!* (CI #126) and decided to take the name of your letter column literally. I appreciate that **Mark Ellis** paid me several back-handed compliments by both liking the writing and storytelling on THE CHALLENGERS OF THE UN-KNOWN mini-series and then lambasting the project as having "characters fans didn't recognize and the general readership didn't care about." I'll do the same by congratulating him on having written "what is generally considered to be the definitive comics version of Doc Savage": a factually questionable statement at best; and at worst has the distinction of, say, Dating the Prettiest Girl in Russia.

Okay, so now that we know who has the bigger penis, I want to just clarify a few things. I don't know why a "win some, lose some" attitude doesn't apply to the measure of success the mini-series had. I, along with **Tim Sale**, DC editors **Barbara Randall-Kesel, Elliot Maggin, Katie Main** and **Dick Giordano** *tried* to bring what had been a very *unsuccessful* title into the present-day market and unhappily it didn't reach as wide an audience as I personally would have liked. However, we did outsell a number of DC books, including (at the time) several Superman titles, WONDER WOMAN and DR. FATE.

What I was trying to make clear in COMICS INTERVIEW #123 is that when I began the project, ANIMAL MAN was selling quite well. Two years later, when the Chalis mini-series was finally published, the market had moved away from more adult-themed (dark?) revivals. With the same 20/20 hindsight **Mr. Ellis** is now using, I would have done it differently and I suspect DC would too.

But the irony is that ANIMAL MAN, DOOM PATROL and SWAMP THING are all "guilty" of the same sort of approach I took (and **Mr. Ellis** disproves of), and they are still being published with a very loyal audience. I wonder how many of those core readers are part of **Mr. Ellis'** Ground Zero.

Revivals are a tricky thing at best. As Groucho once said, "You can please some of the people some of the time; and you can please some of the people some of the time; but you can't please some of the people some of the time."

The mail and reviews were very positive, so *I* took that to mean that those people who read the book enjoyed it. We now know that doesn't include **Mr. Ellis**.

Jeph Loeb
Empath Films
14527 Dickens St.
Sherman Oaks, CA 91403

AYN RAND LIVES!

Dear **Mr. Kraft,**

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is **Bryan Durren,** and I'm a 22-year-old aspiring comic-book artist, trying to break into the business. I would like to thank you (belatedly) for CI #113, for introducing me to a name I had never heard before — **Ayn Rand.** After reading #113, I wanted to find out what the hype was about, so I picked up THE FOUNTAINHEAD. I have since read ATLAS SHRUGGED, ANTHEM, THE ROMANTIC MANIFESTO and NIGHT OF JANUARY 16TH.

The best part is there's still a few more books left to read. These books have made a huge impact on me, so that means your magazine is the reason for it. Anyway, thanks.

Bryan Durren
1220 E. Lincoln, apt. 8
Royal Oak, MI 48067

And thank you for the note. I rather envy you the experience of reading Rand's books for the first time. I reread ATLAS SHRUGGED about every five years or so and always enjoy the experience. She wrote about real superheroes!

- DAK

INTERVIEW welcomes your thoughts and comments in the Last Word. Send your correspondence to: DAK, COMICS INTERVIEW, 234 Fifth Ave., Suite 301, New York, NY 10001, or fax your letter to (706) 782-6625. Please include your name and address.

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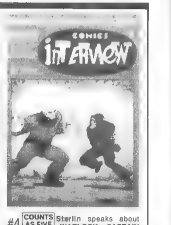

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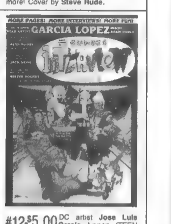

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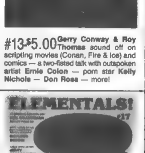

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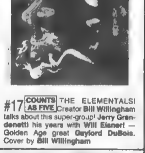

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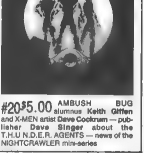

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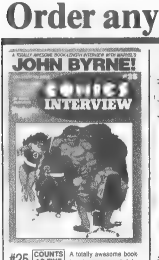

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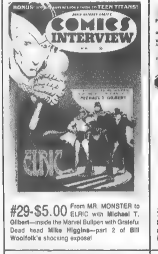

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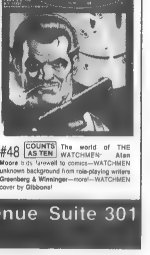

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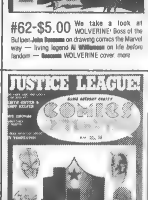

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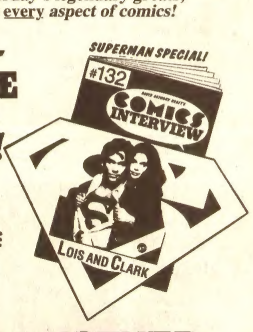

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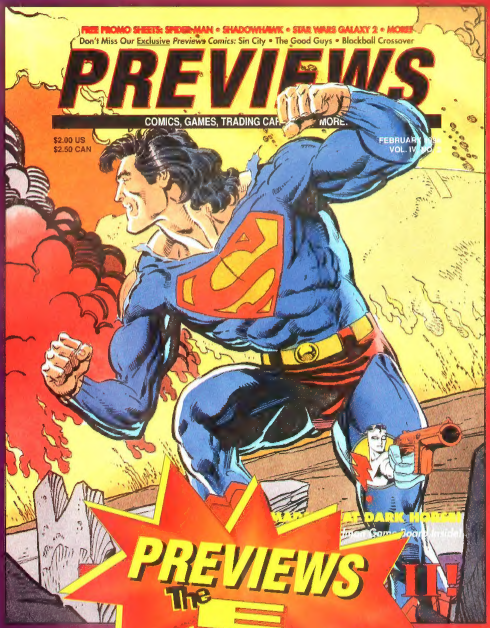
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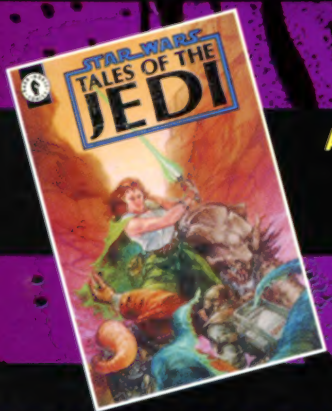

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